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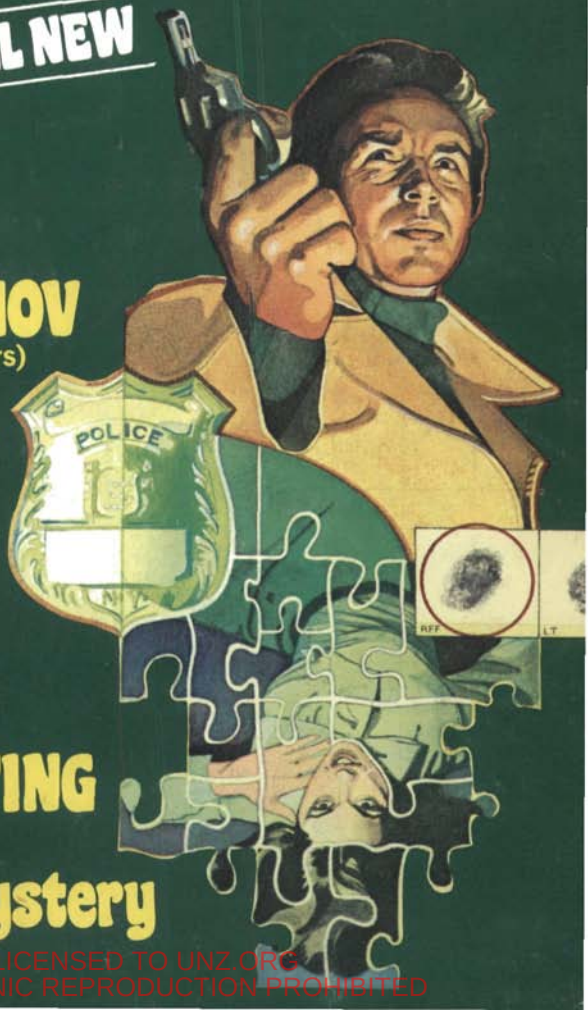

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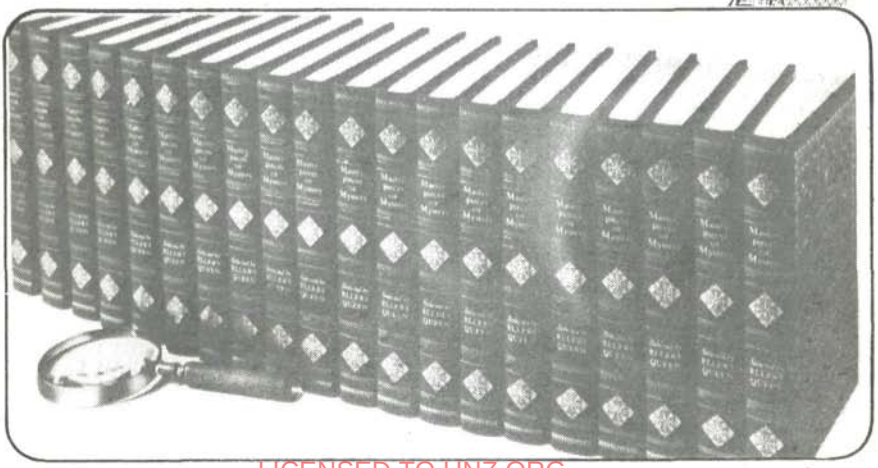

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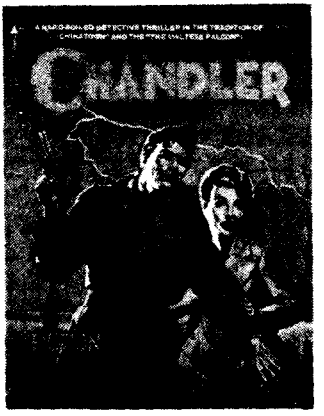

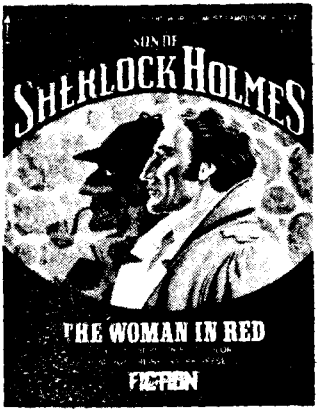

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a *NEW* Virgil Tibbs story by

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Virgil Tibbs's second case in short-story length—another police procedural featuring the most famous black detective in fiction, the protagonist of that wonderful movie, "In the Heat of the Night" . . . All Virgil had as a clue was a cocktail napkin, but that was enough for him to out-Sherlock the Great One himself. Follow the trail with documentary detail . . .

VIRGIL TIBBS AND THE COCKTAIL NAPKIN

by JOHN BALL

The 134 freeway is reasonably well lit as it passes through Glendale so that Mrs. Robert Shozinsky had no difficulty as she drove carefully only a little over the legal limit of 55 miles per hour. Because she was alone in her car, she had the doors locked. As soon as she passed the city limits the roadway became much darker, particularly when it began the long climb up toward the Arroyo Seco bridge that led into Pasadena.

The freeway had been carved out of the side of a substantial hill, one that would have been called a mountain in many other places; consequently it was both isolated and very dark at two o'clock in the morning. Since the only illumination Mrs. Shozinsky had was provided by her own headlights, she did not see the body until she was almost on it.

Her fingers locked with sudden panic as she swerved her car; her knuckles went white against the steering wheel. For the first few seconds she was unable to realize exactly where she was, then she saw that she had reached the top of the long grade, and the first lights of Pasadena were visible ahead. Although the freeway was almost deserted at that hour on Monday night, she used her

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turn signal as she pulled off to the right. She was a knowledgeable woman and she remembered there were emergency telephones approximately every quarter mile along the right of way.

She saw one about 200 feet ahead. She let her car come to a stop beside it, and seconds later she was in communication with the operator at the Zone Five headquarters of the California Highway Patrol.

"There's a man lying on the freeway," she reported, "on his face, all sprawled out. I—I almost ran over him. Please come quickly!"

"Right now," the operator assured her. He made note of the phone number she was calling from and popped the slip on the conveyor belt.

The dispatcher put the call on the air promptly and also notified the Fire Department paramedics. Four minutes later Mrs. Shozinsky had company—a one-man CHP unit arrived at almost the same moment the red paramedic unit rolled up, silently but with lights flashing. No one used sirens on the freeway system; they had proved to be too dangerous.

The body was spreadeagled on the concrete pavement in the Number Four lane, lying almost directly opposite the sign that marked the city limits of Pasadena. The paramedics went to work immediately while the highway patrolman set out emergency flares. It did not take them long. The taller of the two men gave the verdict. "Dead," he said simply. Then he asked, "Whose jurisdiction is it?"

The patrolman couldn't answer that immediately. Instead he went on the air with the suggestion that both Pasadena and LAPD be notified. Meanwhile, the paramedics covered the body and informed the coroner's office. By the time they had finished and were ready to pull away, a white Matador patrol car from Pasadena was just rolling up. The two officers were getting out of their vehicle when a Los Angeles black and white appeared.

The highway patrol officer thanked his informer for her cooperation and sent her on her way after he had taken her name and address.

The four newly arrived officers surveyed the situation and mutually determined what they had. One man from each team radioed in, at almost the same time. "Homicide," the Pasadena officer reported to his dispatcher. "Possible 187. Request full backup."

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The dispatcher alerted the watch commander, Lieutenant Robenson, who wanted to know the exact location. "Is that in our jurisdiction?" he asked.

"I think so, but Bob Watson also asked for a full backup."

Code 187 meant murder, so Robenson did not hesitate. He called out a homicide team that would respond with its specially equipped vehicle, then he dialed an unlisted number on his personnel index. Virgil Tibbs answered the third ring.

"Good morning, Virg," Robenson said. "Rise and shine. Apologize to the young lady, I assume there is one, and come on in. We have a nice dead body for you."

"I don't want a dead body," Tibbs replied, "I want to get some sleep."

He hung up after that, because any further conversation would be pointless, and dressed quickly. He ran his hand across the skin of his face, but despite the stubble, he decided not to take time to shave.

The black detective found a small mob scene when he arrived at the point on the freeway, close to Malcolm Street, where the body had been found. The Pasadena Police had put a full homicide team into action and the LAPD had sent an even larger contingent. Obviously, the question of jurisdiction had not been clarified. Both teams were busy taking photographs and making the usual measurements while two men from the coroner's office waited patiently to remove the body.

Virgil went quietly to the place where the body lay, removed the cover, and began a swift careful examination. He had barely started when a tall, powerfully built man in plainclothes appeared at his side. "May I see your ID, please," he asked.

A uniformed Pasadena sergeant answered for Virgil. "He's with us—our top homicide man."

The Los Angeles man remembered what he had heard about Pasadena's specialist. "Virgil Tibbs?" he asked.

Tibbs rose and shook hands. "Tim Yost," the tall man introduced himself. "That whitehead over there is Vince Scott, my partner."

"Nice to know you," Tibbs said.

"I don't know why they called you out, Virgil. The body is in Los Angeles and it's our headache."

"Assuming the sign is accurately placed," Tibbs countered, "from the hips down it's in Pasadena."

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"Look, Virgil, the guy was shot in the head—one neat hole right in the forehead. On this side of the freeway he had to be coming from Los Angeles. Somebody made the hit in a car, then dumped him out. It's ours all the way."

"Suppose," Virgil suggested, "that the car stopped and he got out. Not a likely place, but I'm assuming he wasn't given any choice. Then he was shot. The hole in the forehead fits and that would keep any blood out of the car."

"Remote, but possible," Yost conceded.

"The man fell where he was found. I didn't get very far with my examination, but if he had been thrown from a moving vehicle, there would be abrasion marks, particularly on his exposed skin. There don't seem to be any. That points to his having been put out, and then shot."

"So?" Yost asked.

"Notice the position of the feet. He was standing in Pasadena when he was shot—from the hips down he's clearly on the left side of the sign. He fell forward, partly into Los Angeles, after he was fatally wounded. It's our case."

It was an impasse which for the moment no one was in a position to resolve. "Have you IDed the victim?" Tibbs asked.

"Yes, there were some things in his pockets—nothing very significant. Look, the powers that be will settle whether you'll be handling this one or Vince and me, so for the moment why don't we avoid duplication of effort?"

"I'll agree to that," Virgil said. "But I'd still like to know exactly what was in his pockets."

"Just the usual things—a wallet, pocket comb, ballpoint pen, some change, a key case, a handkerchief, and a cocktail napkin."

Tibbs made a swift decision. "All right, you take the body and all the personal effects. Let me have the napkin. I'll work on that."

Yost looked at his partner for a moment of silence, then the two men seemed to agree by telepathy. "It's a deal," Yost declared.

The napkin had the name of a bar printed across one corner. Apart from that it was very ordinary, exactly like tens of thousands of others produced in quantity by the same supplier. It was relatively fresh and clean; the only marking was a faint ring on the middle of the printed side where a cocktail or some other drink had once stood. The ring was a light reddish color, and

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apart from that, the napkin was entirely unmarked.

Knowing the ways of bars, Virgil Tibbs spent the morning in his office preparing for a court appearance coming up later in the week. Then, after his usual lunch of a sandwich and a large glass of milk, he took a plain car off the police lot and headed into Los Angeles. Halfway down the Pasadena Freeway he picked up the microphone clipped to the dash and advised the LAPD that he was coming into their jurisdiction. He gave no reason and he was not asked for one.

Locating the bar had been a simple matter of checking the phone book; it was on the west side of the city in a respectable neighborhood.

At a little after two Kitty and Sam's Bar was open for the early-afternoon trade. As Tibbs walked inside he saw that the place was almost deserted, a situation that suited him perfectly. He sat down on a bar stool and noted that the napkin the bartender placed before him was an exact duplicate of the one he had in his pocket.

"I'm a police officer," Tibbs said quietly. "I came by for a little information."

"I'd like to see some ID," the bartender said.

Virgil opened the thin leather folder he carried and displayed his badge. The barman nodded.

Virgil produced the cocktail napkin he had and laid it carefully on the bar. "I believe that a man was in here last night who took this away with him," he said.

"That's possible, it's one of ours. What time last night?"

"I don't know, perhaps around midnight. It was probably last night because the napkin isn't crumpled or pocket-worn. If he'd had it for two or three days, it wouldn't look this fresh."

The bartender nodded again. "I'll buy that. Can you describe him?"

"Possibly, but something else first. You noticed the ring on the napkin?"

"Sure, of course. Nothing unusual about that."

"What I'd like," Tibbs continued, "is to have you show me the glass that fits that ring. It would be a tall one without a stem, because a stemmed glass wouldn't leave that kind of ring."

"It might. A stemmed glass could have been standing on the bare bar and then set on the napkin. That would do it." The bartender was beginning to enjoy himself.

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Virgil shook his head. "The man wasn't sitting at the bar. He was at one of the tables. As a wild guess, I'd say somewhere in the back."

"Because he didn't want to be seen?"

"Possibly, but the napkin gave me the idea."

"How?"

"First, it's almost impossible to keep a bar constantly clean and dry—some moisture is almost inevitable when the bar is in heavy use. Did you have a good crowd?"

"Yes, we did."

"Then the bar was probably moist if not wet, but the back of the napkin hasn't been dampened; you can see that."

The bartender turned the napkin over and studied its reverse side. As Tibbs had said, it showed no trace of ever having been wet. "So you figure that your man wasn't at the bar, but was at a table that had been wiped dry."

"Exactly. And if you had a good crowd, and he came in late as I think he might have, he would have most likely taken a rear table—one that hadn't been used and therefore was still dry."

"That's kinda far-fetched, isn't it?" the barman asked.

"Maybe, but the table part is worth a bet, I think. Now, will you see about matching a tall glass onto the ring on the napkin?"

The man behind the bar found the right one on his second try. It matched the stain perfectly.

Virgil set the glass to one side on the bar. "Now that we know the kind of glass, it narrows the number of possible drinks. You notice the color of the ring—it has a reddish tinge."

The bartender thought for a few seconds, then he snapped his fingers. "I just remembered," he said. "It might be it. Every bar gets some strange orders now and then, but last night somebody ordered a Harvey Wallbanger without the vodka—just the orange juice and the Galliano."

"Which could leave a ring of about that color?"

"I'd say so, yes. That is, if the drink ran over a little, and that happens all the time."

"Now we're getting somewhere," Tibbs said. "Tell me about the customer with the odd taste in drinks."

The man behind the bar shook his head. "I didn't even see him. One of the girls served him. I think it was Elsie."

That was a setback, but only a minor one. Elsie was due in within the half hour and patience being one of Tibbs's virtues, he

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was willing to wait. A few customers drifted in, but they settled themselves in booths and closed out the rest of the world. The bartender came back to Virgil once more. "Have one on the house while you're waiting?" he asked.

"On duty," Tibbs answered.

The barman filled a tall glass with ice and ran some Coke inside. He added a few drops of something and dropped in a cherry. "A little specialty of my own," he said. "No voltage at all, but nice."

There was no way that could be refused. Virgil tried it and found the drink unexpectedly pleasant. He sipped it and then downed half of it in a burst of thirst-quenching satisfaction. Ten minutes later the bartender made him another.

Elsie arrived a few minutes late—a tall leggy girl with a costume cut low enough to stir the customers' interest, but not low enough to gratify it to any measurable degree. She was a cocktail waitress with just the right manner to keep her clear of unwanted involvements and still earn her the maximum in tips.

After introductions, she settled down in a booth with Tibbs for a few minutes of conversation. Fortunately she was intelligent and had a good memory. "I know the man you want," she said after she had been briefed. "He came in last night about eleven or so; I don't remember the exact time. He was alone. When he ordered that unusual drink, I was certain he was waiting to meet someone. Nobody would come in here to pay a dollar and a half for four ounces of orange juice and a little Galliano—the solitary drinkers go for the heavy stuff, straight doubles and things like that."

"Where did he sit?"

Elsie gestured toward the back. "One of those tables, I can't say definitely which one. He sat where he could see everyone who came in and out."

"How did he treat you?"

"Oh, very nicely. He was polite, gentlemanly, easy to take care of."

"Under the influence at all?"

The girl shook her head. "Not at all—stone-cold sober, and believe me, I know."

"And did someone join him?"

"Yes, a man did after a while, I can't say just when because it was quite busy at that time."

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"Do you remember anything about the man?"

"Somewhat. I'd never seen seen him in here before. Not a very big man. Dark complexion, olive skin, but that's a guess with the lights we have in here." She hesitated.

"But not a black man," Tibbs finished for her.

She nodded. "That's right. One more thing I can tell you about him—he had a very odd nose. It was big and had two or three ridges or bumps on it. It was almost funny."

Virgil got up. "That ought to do it. Did you notice if they went out together?"

"Yes, they did. Funny nose had a drink, a quick one, and then they left."

Virgil gave a brief description of the man who had been found dead on the freeway and mentioned how he had been dressed. The girl nodded promptly. "That's him," she said. "The nice guy who was waiting, the one who drank the Wallbangers without the vodka."

Halfway home on the Pasadena Freeway, Tibbs received a radio call. On responding, he was asked to switch to tac. two. As soon as he had done so, he was told that Tim Yost of the LAPD wanted to meet him. Yost and his partner, Vince Scott, were at the West Valley station, which was a good distance away. Tibbs said he would be there in about 45 minutes. Back came a reply that Yost and Scott would come to see him.

As soon as he returned to his own headquarters Virgil headed directly for the intelligence unit and sat down with Jim Larsh who worked that section. He produced his description of the man with the odd nose, supplied the m.o. of the homicide, and through Larsh let the computers go to work. Well before his colleagues from Los Angeles arrived, he had most of the information he wanted. He lacked a photograph, but that could be obtained as soon as it was needed. Meanwhile, the fingerprint classification was quite adequate.

Just off the executive offices on the fourth floor, the PPD had a small conference room. When Yost and Scott got there Tibbs took them up, then carefully shut the door. "Very nice of you guys to come by," he said.

Yost, as the senior member of the team, took over. "Virgil, we want to thank you for responding to that homicide on the freeway. We've got a ruling that it's our case, so you don't have to

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worry about it any more. It's a little heavy and we're laying on a maximum effort. We think we can crack it in forty-eight hours."

"Fine," Tibbs said. "Has the word been passed to our department that we're out of it?"

"I think so," Scott answered.

"Then I'm relieved." Virgil took his time. "Do you mind telling me one thing?" he asked.

"Sure, go ahead."

"When did the victim graduate from the academy?"

Yost and Scott exchanged quick glances that showed visible concern, then Yost became firmer. "What do you know?" he asked.

Virgil relaxed. "Some facts, some conjectures. Mixing them up, I'd say the victim was an LAPD officer, recently out of the academy, never on the street, and pulling his first undercover assignment. He had been put in against the big boys and that was a mistake, because he wasn't ready for that yet. Somewhere along the line they made him, just about the time something fairly big was about to go down. They didn't play around; they set him up for a meet, got him in a car, then terminated him. Putting him right on the line between two jurisdictions was deliberate. Would you care for a description of the man who suckered him in?"

"Damn it!" Yost muttered.

"Who've you been talking to?" Scott asked tightly.

Yost leaned forward. "Right now I want to know how you got all that—and in so little time. This operation was supposed to be totally leakproof—we've been on it for weeks. If I've got to see your chief, I want to know who opened the door, even to another department."

"Would you guys care for some coffee or a cold drink?" Tibbs asked. "Nothing fancy, but we have some machines that put out the usual stuff."

"You said that you have a description," Scott said. "We'd be very interested in that."

The black detective allowed himself to smile. "Courtesy of the Pasadena Police Department, I can give you a fairly hot suspect. Description: five feet seven and a half, olive complexion, dark hair, slight scar on the back of his right hand, and a large nose broken at least twice and badly reset, if at all."

Scott responded with sudden interest. "Right—we know him."

"So do we," Tibbs continued. "Rafael Monza, sometimes known as Nosey. A specialist in the use of small-caliber arms and also

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good with a knife. Two convictions for 211, two for assault with a deadly weapon. Out on parole as a reformed and now valuable member of society."

Yost was deadly serious. "Virgil, if you can establish a positive link between Monza and our boy—any evidence at all that they had ever even met—you've done us a helluva service."

Virgil put the cocktail napkin onto the table. "There's your lead," he said. "It's all you gave me, but fortunately all I needed. I've got two witnesses for you and both, I'm sure, will cooperate, since they've already talked to me. Respectable people, no record—I checked them out. They'll make a good impression on the grand jury."

Yost and Scott were silent for a moment. There was communication between them, but none of it had to be spoken. Then Scott looked up. "Anything else?" he asked.

"Just one thing. After you left the place where the body was discovered, I went back for another look. You know how the freeways are landscaped—it's a very nice job most of the time. That shallow hillside was covered by an eight-inch-high growth that left a few traces."

"Just what are you telling us?" Yost inquired.

"Your man was shot in Pasadena, just over the line. Then the body was dragged back a few feet and put under the sign deliberately to create a police problem. But if you don't choose to tell anyone that, I don't think I will either."

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a *NEW* short story by

LAWRENCE BLOCK

We welcome Lawrence Block's first story to appear in these pages and Mr. Block himself to the ever-growing family of EQMM contributors. Mr. Block has a style and humor all his own, and his newest story is a "chip off the old Block"—of a burglar and a businessman and what came of their unexpected meeting . . .

GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT

by *LAWRENCE BLOCK*

The burglar, a slender and clean-cut chap just past 30, was rifling a drawer in the bedside table when Archer Trebizond slipped into the bedroom. Trebizond's approach was as catfooted as if he himself were the burglar, a situation which was manifestly not the case. The burglar never did hear Trebizond, absorbed as he was in his perusal of the drawer's contents, and at length he sensed the other man's presence as a jungle beast senses the presence of a predator.

The analogy, let it be said, is scarcely accidental.

When the burglar turned his eyes on Archer Trebizond his heart fluttered and fluttered again, first at the mere fact of discovery, then at his own discovery of the gleaming revolver in Trebizond's hand. The revolver was pointed in his direction, and this the burglar found upsetting.

"Darn it all," said the burglar, approximately, "I could have sworn there was nobody home. I phoned, I rang the bell—"

"I just got here," Trebizond said.

"Just my luck. The whole week's been like that. I dented a fender on Tuesday afternoon, overturned my fish tank the night before last. An unbelievable mess all over the carpet, and I lost a

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mated pair of African mouthbreeders so rare they don't have a Latin name yet. I'd hate to tell you what I paid for them."

"Hard luck," Trebizond said.

"And just yesterday I was putting away a plate of fettucine and I bit the inside of my mouth. You ever done that? It's murder, and the worst part is you feel so stupid about it. And then you keep biting it over and over again because it sticks out while it's healing. At least I do." The burglar gulped a breath and ran a moist hand over a moister forehead. "And now this," he said.

"This could turn out to be worse than fenders and fish tanks," Trebizond said.

"Don't I know it. You know what I should have done? I should have spent the entire week in bed. I happen to know a safecracker who consults an astrologer before each and every job he pulls. If Jupiter's in the wrong place or Mars is squared with Uranus or something he won't go in. It sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? And yet it's eight years now since anybody put a handcuff on that man. Now who do you know who's gone eight years without getting arrested?"

"I've never been arrested," Trebizond said.

"Well, you're not a crook."

"I'm a businessman."

The burglar thought of something but let it pass. "I'm going to get the name of his astrologer," he said. "That's just what I'm going to do. Just as soon as I get out of here."

"If you get out of here," Trebizond said. "Alive," Trebizond said.

The burglar's jaw trembled just the slightest bit. Trebizond smiled, and from the burglar's point of view Trebizond's smile seemed to enlarge the black hole in the muzzle of the revolver.

"I wish you'd point that thing somewhere else," he said nervously.

"There's nothing else I want to shoot."

"You don't want to shoot me."

"Oh?"

"You don't even want to call the cops," the burglar went on. "It's really not necessary. I'm sure we can work things out between us, two civilized men coming to a civilized agreement. I've some money on me. I'm an openhanded sort and would be pleased to make a small contribution to your favorite charity, whatever it might be. We don't need policemen to intrude into the private affairs of gentlemen."

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The burglar studied Trebizond carefully. This little speech had always gone over rather well in the past, especially with men of substance. It was hard to tell how it was going over now, or if it was going over at all. "In any event," he ended somewhat lamely, "you certainly don't want to shoot me."

"Why not?"

"Oh, blood on the carpet, for a starter. Messy, wouldn't you say? Your wife would be upset. Just ask her and she'll tell you shooting me would be a ghastly idea."

"She's not at home. She'll be out for the next hour or so."

"All the same, you might consider her point of view. And shooting me would be illegal, you know. Not to mention immoral."

"Not illegal," Trebizond remarked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You're a burglar," Trebizond reminded him. "An unlawful intruder on my property. You have broken and entered. You have invaded the sanctity of my home. I can shoot you where you stand and not get so much as a parking ticket for my trouble."

"Of course you can shoot me in self-defense—"

"Are we on *Candid Camera*?"

"No, but—"

"Is Allen Funt lurking in the shadows?"

"No, but I—"

"In your back pocket. That metal thing. What is it?"

"Just a pry bar."

"Take it out," Trebizond said. "Hand it over. Indeed. A weapon if I ever saw one. I'd state that you attacked me with it and I fired in self-defense. It would be my word against yours, and yours would remain unvoiced since you would be dead. Whom do you suppose the police would believe?"

The burglar said nothing. Trebizond smiled a satisfied smile and put the pry bar in his own pocket. It was a piece of nicely shaped steel and it had a nice heft to it. Trebizond rather liked it.

"Why would you want to kill me?"

"Perhaps I've never killed anyone. Perhaps I'd like to satisy my curiosity. Or perhaps I got to enjoy killing in the war and have been yearning for another crack at it. There are endless possibilities."

"But—"

"The point is," said Trebizond, "you might be useful to me in that manner. As it is, you're not useful to me at all. And stop

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hinting about my favorite charity or other euphemisms. I don't want your money. Look about you. I've ample money of my own—that should be obvious. If I were a poor man you wouldn't have breached my threshold. How much money are you talking about, anyway? A couple of hundred dollars?"

"Five hundred," the burglar said.

"A pittance."

"I suppose. There's more at home but you'd just call that a pittance too, wouldn't you?"

"Undoubtedly." Trebizond shifted the gun to his other hand. "I told you I was a businessman," he said. "Now if there were any way in which you could be more useful to me alive than dead—"

"You're a businessman and I'm a burglar," the burglar said, brightening.

"Indeed."

"So I could steal something for you. A painting? A competitor's trade secrets? I'm really very good at what I do, as a matter of fact, although you wouldn't guess it by my performance tonight. I'm not saying I could whisk the Mona Lisa out of the Louvre, but I'm pretty good at your basic hole-and-corner job of everyday burglary. Just give me an assignment and let me show my stuff."

"Hmmmm," said Archer Trebizond.

"Name it and I'll swipe it."

"Hmmmm."

"A car, a mink coat, a diamond bracelet, a Persian carpet, a first edition, bearer bonds, incriminating evidence, eighteen and a half minutes of tape—"

"What was that last?"

"Just my little joke," said the burglar. "A coin collection, a stamp collection, psychiatric records, phonograph records, police records—"

"I get the point."

"I tend to prattle when I'm nervous."

"I've noticed."

"If you could point that thing elsewhere—"

Trebizond looked down at the gun in his hand. The gun continued to point at the burglar.

"No," Trebizond said, with evident sadness. "No, I'm afriad it won't work."

"Why not?"

"In the first place, there's nothing I really need or want. Could

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you steal me a woman's heart? Hardly. And more to the point, how could I trust you?"

"You could trust me," the burglar said. "You have my word on that."

"My point exactly. I'd have to take your word that your word is good, and where does that lead us? Up the proverbial garden path, I'm afraid. No, once I let you out from under my roof I've lost my advantage. Even if I have a gun trained on you, once you're in the open I can't shoot you with impunity. So I'm afraid—"

"No!"

Trebizond shrugged. "Well, really," he said. "What use are you? What are you good for besides being killed? Can you do anything besides steal, sir?"

"I can make license plates."

"Hardly a valuable talent."

"I know," said the burglar sadly. "I've often wondered why the state bothered to teach me such a pointless trade. There's not even much call for counterfeit license plates, and they've got a monopoly on making the legitimate ones. What else can I do? I must be able to do something. I could shine your shoes, I could polish your car—"

"What do you do when you're not stealing?"

"Hang around," said the burglar. "Go out with ladies. Feed my fish, when they're not all over my rug. Drive my car when I'm not mangling its fenders. Play a few games of chess, drink a can or two of beer, make myself a sandwich—"

"Are you any good?"

"At making sandwiches?"

"At chess."

"I'm not bad."

"I'm serious about this."

"I believe you are," the burglar said. "I'm not your average woodpusher, if that's what you want to know. I know the openings and I have a good sense of space. I don't have the patience for tournament play, but at the chess club downtown I win more games than I lose."

"You play at the club downtown?"

"Of course. I can't burgle seven nights a week, you know. Who could stand the pressure?"

"Then you *can* be of use to me," Trebizond said.

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"You want to learn the game?"

"I know the game. I want you to play chess with me for an hour until my wife gets home. I'm bored, there's nothing in the house to read, I've never cared much for television, and it's hard for me to find an interesting opponent at the chess table."

"So you'll spare my life in order to play chess with me."

"That's right."

"Let me get this straight," the burglar said. "There's no catch to this, is there? I don't get shot if I lose the game or anything tricky like that, I hope."

"Certainly not. Chess is a game that ought to be above gimmickry."

"I couldn't agree more," said the burglar. He sighed a long sigh. "If I didn't play chess," he said, "you wouldn't have shot me, would you?"

"It's a question that occupies the mind, isn't it?"

"It is," said the burglar.

They played in the front room. The burglar drew the white pieces in the first game, opened king's pawn, and played what turned out to be a reasonably imaginative version of the Ruy Lopez. At the sixteenth move Trebizond forced the exchange of knight for rook, and not too long afterward the burglar resigned.

In the second game the burglar played the black pieces and offered the Sicilian Defense. He played a variation that Trebizond wasn't familiar with. The game stayed remarkably even until in the end game the burglar succeeded in developing a passed pawn. When it was clear that he would be able to queen it, Trebizond tipped over his king, resigning.

"Nice game," the burglar offered.

"You play well."

"Thank you."

"Seem's a pity that—"

His voice trailed off. The burglar shot him an inquiring look. "That I'm wasting myself as a common criminal? Is that what you were going to say?"

"Let it go," Trebizond said. "It doesn't matter."

They began setting up the pieces for the third game when a key slipped into a lock. The lock turned, the door opened, and Melissa Trebizond stepped into the foyer and through it to the living room.

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Both men got to their feet. Mrs. Trebizond advanced, a vacant smile on her pretty face. "You found a new friend to play chess with. I'm happy for you."

Trebizond set his jaw. From his back pocket he drew the burglar's pry bar. It had an even nicer heft than he had thought. "Melissa," he said, "I've no need to waste time with a recital of your sins. No doubt you know precisely why you deserve this."

She stared at him, obviously not having understood a word he had said to her, whereupon Archer Trebizond brought the pry bar down on the top of her skull. The first blow sent her to her knees. Quickly he struck her three more times, wielding the metal bar with all his strength, then turned to look into the wide eyes of the burglar.

"You've killed her," the burglar said.

"Nonsense," said Trebizond, taking the bright revolver from his pocket once again.

"Isn't she dead?"

"I hope and pray she is," Trebizond said, "but I haven't killed her. *You've* killed her."

"I don't understand."

"The police will understand," Trebizond said, and shot the burglar in the shoulder. Then he fired again, more satisfactorily this time, and the burglar sank to the floor with a hole in his heart.

Trebizond scooped the chess pieces into their box, swept up the board, and set about the business of arranging things. He suppressed an urge to whistle. He was, he decided, quite pleased with himself. Nothing was ever entirely useless, not to a man of resources. If fate sent you a lemon you made lemonade.

The May 1977 issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale March 31.

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a *NEW* Inspector Ghote novelet by

H. R. F. KEATING

After ten years of writing novels and short stories about Inspector Ghote of the Bombay C.I.D., the creator of Ghote paid his first visit to India, and here is what the author calls the "first fruit" of that visit. As to the Noted British Author who "assists" Inspector Ghote with his "slight discrepancies, small lacunas, and significant variations" (à la Mr. Peduncle, the old shell collector)—well, his name and description are a giveaway. The initials of Mr. Keating's first two names are H. R. Indeed, Mr. Keating's full name is Henry Reymond Fitzwalter Keating . . . An address "was the simple key to a solid case" . . .

INSPECTOR GHOTE AND THE LOOSE END

by *H. R. F. KEATING*

Perched on a creaking wobbly chair in the office of Bombay's Deputy Commissioner (Crime), the peon put one broken-nailed finger against Inspector Ghote's name on the painted board behind the D.C.C.'s desk. He swayed topplingly to one side, scraped hold of the fat white pin which indicated *Bandobast Duties,* brought it back across in one swooping rush, and pressed it firmly into place.

Watching him, Ghote gave an inward sigh. Bandobast duties. Someone, of course, had to deal with the thousand and one matters necessary for the smooth running of Crime Branch, but nevertheless bandobast duty was not tracking down breakers of the law and it did seem to fall to him more often than to other officers. Yet, after all, it would be absurd to waste a man of the caliber of, say, Inspector Dandekar on mere administration.

"Yes, Dandekar, yes?"

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The D.C.C. had been interrupted by his internal telephone and there on the other end, as if conjured up by merely having been thought of, was Dandekar himself.

"Yes, yes, of course," the D.C.C. said in answer to the forcefully plaintive sound that had been just audible from the other end. "Certainly you must. I'll see what I can do, ek dum."

He replaced the receiver and turned back to Ghote, the eyes in his sharply commanding face still considering whatever it was he had promised Dandekar.

And then, as if a heaven-sent solution to his problem had appeared in front of him, his expression changed in an instant to happy alertness. He swung round to the peon, who was carefully carrying away his aged chair.

"No," he said. "Put the bandobast pin against—er—Inspector Sawant. I have a task I need Inspector Ghote for."

The peon turned back with his chair to the big painted hierarchy of crime fighters ranging from the Deputy Commissioner himself down to the branch's three dogs, Akbar, Moti, and Caesar. Ghote, in front of the D.C.C.'s wide baize-covered desk, glowed now with pure joy.

"It's this Shivaji Park case," the D.C.C. said.

"Oh, yes, D.C.C. Multiple-stabbing double murder, isn't it? Discovered this morning by that fellow who was in the papers when he came to Bombay, that noted British author."

Ghote, hoping his grasp both of departmental problems and the flux of current affairs would earn him some hint of appreciativeness, was surprised instead to receive a look of almost suspicious surmise. But he got no time to wonder why.

"Yes, quite right," the D.C.C. said briskly. "Dandekar is handling the case, of course. With an influential fellow like this Englishman involved, we must have a really quick result. But there is something he needs help with. Get down to his office straightaway, will you?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, D.C.C."

Clicking his heels together by way of salute, Ghote hurried out.

What would Dandekar have asked for assistance over? There would be a good many different lines to pursue in an affair of this sort. The murdered couple, an ice-cream manufacturer and his wife, had been, so office gup went, attacked in the middle of the night. The assailants had tied up their teenage son and only when he had at last roused the nearest neighbor, this visiting British

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author—of crime books, the paper had said, well-known crime books—had it been discovered that the two older people had been hacked to death.

Brutal goondas of that sort did not, of course, choose just any location. They sniffed around first. And left a trail. Which meant dozens of inquiries in the neighborhood, usually by sub-inspectors from the local station. But with this influential fellow involved . . .

Emerging into the sunlight, Ghote made his way to Dandekar's office which gave directly onto the tree-shaded compound. He pushed open one-half of its bat-wing doors. And there, looking just like his photograph, large as life, or even larger, was the Noted British Author. He was crouching on a small chair in front of Dandekar's green leather-covered desk, covering it much like a big fluffed-up hen on one small precious egg. His hips, clad in trousers already the worse for the dust and stains of Bombay life, dropped on either side while a considerable belly projected equally far forward. Above was a beard, big and sprawling as the body beneath, and above the beard was hair, plentiful and inclined to shoot in all directions. Somewhere between beard and hair a pale British face wore a look of acute curiosity.

"Ah, Ghote, thank God," Dandekar, stocky, muscular, hook-nosed, greeted him immediately in sharp T-spitting Marathi. "Listen, take this curd-face out of my sight. Fast."

Ghote felt a terrible abrupt inward sinking. So this was how he was to assist Dandekar, by keeping from under his feet a, no doubt, notable British nuisance. Even bandobast duties would have been better.

But Dandekar could hardly produce that expected rapid result with such a burden. He squared his bony shoulders.

"Mr. Peduncle," Dandekar said, in English now, "I would like you to—"

"It's not Peduncle actually," the Noted British Author broke in. "Important to get the little details right, you know. That's what the old shell collector in my books—he's Mr. Peduncle—is always telling his friend, Inspector Sugden. No, my name's Reymond, Henry Reymond, author of the Peduncle books."

The multitudinous beard split with a wide, clamorously ingratiating grin.

"Yes, yes," said Dandekar briskly. "But this is Inspector Ghote. He will be assisting me. Ghote, the domestic servant of the place

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has disappeared, a Goan known as John Louzado. They had no address at his native place, but we might get it from a former employer. Will you see to that? And Mr. Ped—Mr. Reymond, who is expressing most keen interest in our methods, can attach himself to you while I talk with the son, the young man who was tied up—rather, the adopted son. I think somehow he could tell a good deal more."

Ghote put out his hand for Mr. Reymond to shake. The Inspector did not look forward to dealing with the numerous questions likely to arise from that keen interest in Bombay C.I.D. methods.

As Ghote drove the Noted British Author in one of the branch's big battered cars down Dr. D. N. Road toward Colaba where the fleeing servant's former employer lived, he found his worst forebodings justified. His companion wanted to know everything—what was that building, what this, was that man happy lying on the pavement, where else could he go?

Jockeying for place in the traffic, swerving for cyclists, nipping past great lumbering red buses, Ghote did his best to provide pleasing answers. But the fellow was never content. Nothing seemed to delight him more than hitting on some small discrepancy and relentlessly pursuing it, comparing himself all the while to his detective character, Mr. Peduncle, and his "The significant variation—in that lies all secrets." If Ghote heard the phrase once in the course of their twenty-minute drive, he seemed to hear it a dozen times.

At last when they were waiting at the light to get into Colaba Road, he was reduced to putting a question of his own. How did it come about, he interrupted, that Mr. Reymond was living in a flat up at Shivaji Park? Would not the Taj Hotel down there have been more suitable for a distinguished visitor?

"Ah, yes, I know what you mean," the author answered with an enthusiasm that gave Ghote considerable inward pleasure. "But, you see, I am here by courtesy of Air-India, on their new Swap-a-Country Plan. They match various people with their Indian equivalents and exchange homes. Most far-sighted. So I am at Shivaji Park and the writer who lives there—well, he has written some short stories, though I gather he's actually a Deputy Inspector of Smoke Nuisances and a relation of your State Minister for Police Affairs and the Arts, as it happens—well, he at the present moment is installed in my cottage in Wiltshire and no

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doubt getting as much out of going down to the pub as I get from being in a flat lucky enough to have a telephone so that people are always popping in and, while they're looking up a number in the little book, talking away like one o'clock."

The Noted British Author's eyes shone.

"Yes," Ghote said.

Certain queries had occurred to him. Could there, for instance, be an exchange between a police inspector in Bombay and one in, say, New York? But somehow he could not see himself getting several months' Casual Leave, and he doubted whether many other similar Bombayites would find it easy.

But he felt that to voice such doubts aloud would be impolite. And his hesitation was fatal.

"Tell me," Mr. Reymond said, "that sign saying De Luxe Ding Dong Nylon Suiting—" And in a moment they had struck full on another "significant variation."

Desperately Ghote pulled one more question out of the small stock he had put together.

"Please, what is your opinion of the books of Mr. Erle Stanley Gardner? To me Perry Mason is seeming an extremely clever individual altogether."

"Yes," said the Noted British Author, and he was then silent until they reached their destination in Second Pasta Lane.

Mrs. Patel, wife of a civil servant and former employer of John Louzado, was a lady of 40 or so dressed in a cotton sari of a reddish pattern at once assertive and entirely without grace.

"You are lucky to find me, Inspector," she said when Ghote had explained their business. "At the Family Planning office where I undertake voluntary work, Clinic begins at ten sharp."

Ghote could not stop himself glancing at his watch though he well knew it was at least 10:30 already.

"Well, well," Mrs. Patel said impatiently, "already I am behind schedule. But there is so much to be done. So much to be done."

She darted across the sitting room, a place almost as littered with piles of papers as any office at Crime Branch, and plumped up a cushion.

"Just if you have the address of John's native place," Ghote said.

"Of course, of course. I am bound to have it. I always inquire most particularly after a servant's personal affairs. You are getting an altogether better loyalty factor then. Don't you find that,

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Mr.—I am afraid I am not hearing your name?"

She had turned her by no means negligible gaze full on the Noted British Author Ghote, who had hoped not to explain his companion, introduced him with a brief "Mr. Reymond, from U.K."

"Yes," said Mrs Patel. "Well, don't you find—ah, but you are *the* Mr. Reymond, the British author, isn't it? Most pleased to meet you, my dear sir. Most pleased. What I always find with criminological works is the basic fact emerging, common to many sociological studies, a pattern of fundamental human carelessness, isn't it? You see—"

But, river-spate rapid though she was, she had met her match.

"One moment—I am sorry to interrupt—but there is a slight discrepancy here. You see, there are two different sorts of crime books involved. You are talking about sociological works, but what I write are crime novels. Indeed, it's just the sort of mistake my detective, Mr. Peduncle the old collector of sea shells, is always pointing out. 'The significant variation—in that lies all secrets.' "

"Ah, most interesting," Mrs. Patel came back, recovering fast. "Of course I have read a good deal of Erle Stanley Gardner and so forth, and I must say—"

She gave them her views at such length that Ghote at last, politeness or not, felt forced to break in.

"Madam, madam. If you will excuse. There is the matter of John's native-place address."

"Yes, yes. I am getting it."

Mrs. Patel plunged toward a bureau and opened its flap-down front. A considerable confusion of documents was revealed, together with what looked like the wrappings for a present bought but never handed to its intended recipient.

Prolonged searching located, first, an address book, then "a list of things like this which I jot down," and finally the back of a notebook devoted to household hints clipped from magazines. But no address.

"Madam," Ghote ventured at last, "is it possible you did not in fact take it down?"

"Well, well, one cannot make a note of everything. That is one of my principles—keep the paperwork down to the minimum."

She gave the British author some examples of Indian bureaucracy. Once or twice Ghote tried to edge him away, but even a tug

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at the distinguished shirtsleeve was unsuccessful. Only when the author himself began explaining how British bureaucracy was a crutch that fatally hampered people like Inspector Sugden in his own books did Ghote act.

"Madam, I regret. Mr. Reymond, sir. We are conducting investigation. It is a matter of urgency."

And with that he did get the author onto the landing outside. But as Mrs. Patel was shutting the door with many a "Goodbye then" and "So interesting—I must try to find one of your books," Mr. Reymond said, "Inspector, there is a small lacuna."

Ghote stared.

"Please, what is lacuna?"

"Something missing, a loose end. You haven't asked where Louzado worked before he came here. Mr. Peduncle would have a word to say to you. If there's one thing he always seizes on it is the little lacuna."

The bursting-out beard parted to reveal a roguish smile.

"Yes," said Ghote. "You are perfectly correct. Madam, do you have the address of John's former employer?"

"Why, yes, of course," Mrs. Patel replied, with a note of sharpness. "I can tell you that out of my head. John was recommended to me by my friends, the Dutt-Dastars."

And, mercifully, she came straight out with the address—it was somewhat south of the Racecourse—and Ghote was even able to prevent her giving them a detailed account of the posh-sounding Dutt-Dastars.

Since their route took them past Crime Branch H.Q., Ghote decided to risk the Noted British Author re-attaching himself to Inspector Dandekar and to report progress. Besides, if he could install Mr. Reymond in his own office for ten minutes only, it would give him a marvelous respite from the relentless questions.

So, a peon summoned and Coca-Cola thrust on the distinguished visitor, Ghote went down to Dandekar.

"Well, Inspector," he asked, "did the son have more to tell?"

"More to tell he has," Dandekar answered, sipping tea and dabbing his face with a towel. "But speak he will not."

"He is not one hundred percent aboveboard then?"

"He is not. I was up there at Shivaji Park within half an hour of the time he freed himself from those ropes, and I could see at a glance the marks were not right at all."

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"Too high up the wrists, was it?"

"Exactly, Inspector. That young man tied himself up. And that must mean he was in collusion with the fellows who killed the old couple. How else did they get in, if he did not open to them? No, three of them were in it together, and the Goan and a notorious bad hat from the vicinity called Budhoo have gone off with the jewelry. You can bet your boots on that."

"But the young man will not talk?" Ghote asked.

"He will not talk. College-educated, you know, and thinks he has all the answers."

Ghote nodded agreement. It was a common type and the bane of a police officer's life. His determination to push forward the case by getting hold of John Louzado's address redoubled.

"Well," he said, "I must be getting back to Mr. Reymond or he will come looking for us."

In answer Dandekar grinned like an exulting film villain.

But, when he got back to his office, he found the Noted British Author doing something more ominous than looking for Dandekar. He was furiously making notes on a little pad.

"Ah," he said the moment Ghote came in, "just one or two points that occurred to me in connection with the case."

Ghote felt this last straw float down.

"Oh, yes," he answered, waggishly as he could. "We would be very delighted to have the assistance of the great Mr. Peduncle and his magical shell collection."

"No, no," the noted author said quickly. "Mr. Peduncle's shells are by no means magical. There's a slight discrepancy there. You see, Mr. Peduncle examines shells to detect their little variations, and equally he examines the facts of a case and hits on significant variations there."

"The significant variation in which are lying all secrets," Ghote quoted.

Mr. Reymond laughed with great heartiness. But in the car, heading north up Sir J. J. Road, he nevertheless explained in detail every single discrepancy he had noted in his little pad.

It seemed that, in the comparatively short time between the apparently distraught son coming to say he had been set upon and Inspector Dandekar bringing him to Crime Branch H.Q., the author had accumulated a great many facts and bits of hearsay. All of them must have been boiling away in his fertile mind and now they spumed out.

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Most were trivialities arising from the domestic routine of the dead couple, or of his own flat or the flats nearby. To them Ghote succeeded in finding answers. But what he could not always sort out were the queries these answers produced. "Significant variations" seemed to spring up like buzzing whining insects in the first flush of the monsoon.

Only one point, to Ghote's mind, could be said to have any real connection with the killing, and that was so slight that in any other circumstances he would have thrust it off.

But it was a fact, apparently, that Mr. Reymond's servant, an old Muslim called Fariqua, or more precisely the servant of the absent Indian author of some short stories, had been discovered on the morning of the murder asleep inside the flat when he should have been in the distant suburb of Andheri where since the author's arrival he had been boarded out—"Well, I mean, the chap actually seemed to sleep on the couch in the sitting room, and I thought that was a bit much really"—and he had provided no explanation.

"Now," Mr. Reymond said, turning in his seat and wagging his finger close to Ghote's face, "he must have hidden himself away in the kitchen till I'd gone to bed. And isn't that just exactly the sort of variation from the normal which my Mr. Peduncle would seize on, and which my Inspector Sugden would try to shrug off. Eh, Inspector?"

Ghote felt the honor of the Bombay force at stake.

"Certainly I do not shrug off this at all, Mr. Reymond," he said. "After we have seen the Dutt-Dastars I will have a word with Fariqua. But then, since you would be at home, perhaps you would care to rest yourself for the afternoon. I know this humid weather makes visitors most extremely fatigued."

He held his breath in anxiety. To his delight Mr. Reymond, after consideration, acquiesced.

And if at the Dutt-Dastars' he got Louzado's address . . .

The Dutt-Dastars, it appeared, were a couple entirely devoted to art. Their house was crammed with Mrs. Dutt-Dastar's oil paintings, sprawling shapes in bus-red and sky-blue, and Mr. Dutt-Dastar's metal sculptures, jagged iron masses, inclined to rust, and a considerable menace, Ghote found, to trouser bottoms and shirtsleeves. And in the Bengali way their devotion was expressed as much in words as in acts.

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Mr. Reymond they seized on as a fellow artist, blithely ignoring any occasion when he tried to point out a discrepancy, lacuna, or significant variation. And equally ignored, time and again, were Ghote's attempts to get an answer to the one question he still saw, despite the somewhat odd behavior of Mr. Reymond's Fariqua, as the plain and simple way to get their evidence, "Do you have the address in Goa of your former servant, John Louzado?"

At last, when Ghote had established to his complete satisfaction that a couple so utterly vague could not possibly have recorded, much less retained, a servant's address, he planted himself abruptly in front of Mrs. Dutt-Dastar just as she was explaining the full similarity between her painting "Eagle Figure with Two Blue Shapes" and Mr. Reymond's book *Mr. Peduncle Caught in Meshes,* which she had yet actually to read.

"Madam, kindly to tell: who was the previous employer of John Louzado?"

"John Louzado?" Mrs. Dutt-Dastar asked, seemingly totally mystified.

"The servant you recommended to Mrs. Patel, of Second Pasta Lane."

"Ah, John. Yes, what to do about John? He did not suit, not at all—it was sheer madness to have taken him on from someone like Shirin Kothawala, a dear person but with no understanding of the artist—but I could not sack the fellow just like that. And then I remembered that funny Mrs. Patel. Well, she would never notice what a servant was like, would she?"

"Madam, the address of Mrs. Shirin Kothawala?"

"Well, but of course. In one of those divine but madly expensive flats in Nepean Sea Road. A block called Gulmarg. Anybody will tell you."

"Mr. Reymond, I am departing to proceed with inquiries."

"Oh, yes. Yes. My dear fellow. Coming, coming."

On the way back, thanks to Ghote's unequivocal assurance that he would immediately interrogate Fariqua, for all that he privately knew nothing would come of it, the author's questions were at least confined to the sociological. But before they arrived Ghote decided to issue a warning.

"Mr. Reymond, in India—I do not know how it is in U.K.—servants often have matters they are wishing to conceal from their masters, like for instance the true cost of vegetables in the

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bazar. So, you see, it would perhaps be better if you yourself were not present when I question Fariqua."

He regarded the author with apprehension. But it seemed he need not have worried.

"Excellent idea, Inspector," Mr. Reymond replied. But then he added, "though there is one small discrepancy."

Ghote knew it had been too good to be true.

"Please?" he asked resignedly.

"Oh, just that we don't have servants in England now. It's why I find it difficult to know how to behave with them."

"Well, you behave with them as if they were servants," Ghote said. "But if you do not wish to be present at the interview, perhaps that would be best."

So he had the pleasure of tackling the Muslim unimpeded by any bulky British shadow. It was a good thing too, because Fariqua proved every bit as evasive as he had told Mr. Reymond servants could be. He needed, when it came down to it, to use a little rough treatment. And he had a notion that cuffs and threatened kicks would not be the way Mr. Peduncle conducted an interrogation.

But, after ten minutes in which Fariqua noisily maintained he had not been in the author's flat at all the previous night, he caved in quite satisfactorily and produced a story that might well be true. He had been playing cards with "some friends" and it had got too late to catch a train to Andheri. So he had bided his time, sneaked back into the author's flat before the door was locked, and had hidden between the stove and the wall till he had been able to take what, he implied, was his rightful place on the sitting-room couch.

Ghote gave him another couple of slaps for impudence.

"Now, what are the names of your card-playing friends?"

"Inspector, I do not know."

But this time Ghote had hardly so much as to growl to get a better answer.

"Oh, Inspector, Inspector. One only I am knowing. It is Kuldip Singh, sir, the driver of Rajinder Sahib at Flat Number Six, Building Number Two."

"Achchha."

Ghote let him go. He ought to walk round to Building Number Two of the flats and check with the Punjabi gentleman's driver, but that must wait. The Noted British Author might change his

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mind and want to come with him. And he would get that vital address much more quickly unencumbered. That, after all, was the simple key to a solid case against the three of them.

It turned out, however, that the Parsi lady's "divine but madly expensive" flat was not, as Mrs. Dutt-Dastar had said, in a block called Gulmarg in Nepean Sea Road, but in a block of that name in Warden Road on the twin-prominence of Cumballa Hill. But at least Mrs. Kothawala, 60, exquisitely dressed, precise as a crane-bird, was helpful. She knew to a week just how long she had employed Louzado. She knew to an anna just how much he had cheated her by.

She also remembered having warned Mrs. Dutt-Dastar about him, and that Mrs. Dutt-Dastar had clearly forgotten before the telephone conversation was halfway through. And she knew for a fact that she had never had John's address in Goa. But, of course, she was able to tell Ghote where he had worked before he had come to her.

But sorting out Mrs. Dutt-Dastar's error had taken a long time and Ghote found that having dutifully telephoned Inspector Dandekar and made sure there was no sign of the Noted British Author—their suspect, the son of the murdered couple, was still unshaken too, he heard—he had time that evening to make only this one inquiry. And that proved as exasperating as the others, worse even since instead of getting at least the name of Louzado's preceding employer he had to be content with the name only of a lady who would be "sure to remember."

Before trying her next morning he gritted his teeth and put in a call to Mr. Reymond who, of course, was only too keen to come with him—"I had been thinking of looking in on Inspector Dandekar actually"—and only by wantonly distorting the geography of Bombay did Ghote persuade him it would be more economical for the author to stay at Shivaji Park until after he had made this one inquiry, which he promised would be rapid.

But in fact the task proved immensely troublesome since the possibly helpful lady had moved and no one nearby seemed to know where to. Application to the postalwallahs met with a certain amount of bureaucratic delay and it was not until the very end of the morning that he had an address to go to. So he telephoned Mr. Reymond once more and dolefully arranged to pick him up after lunch.

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"No sleep for me this afternoon, Inspector," the cheerful voice had assured him. "I've a lot I want to ask you."

"Yes," said Ghote.

The first thing the Noted British Author wanted to know was why Fariqua had not been arrested. Ghote produced the fellow's explanation for the "significant variation" in his behavior.

"Ah, so that accounts for it," Mr. Reymond said, for once apparently happy. "I'm glad to hear it. I wouldn't like to think I was getting my breakfast scrambled eggs from the hands of a murderer."

Ghote gave a jolly laugh. It came to him all the more easily because he had felt sure there would be some lacuna or loose end to pursue. But the journey passed with no more than questions about the peculiarities of passers-by—until they were almost at their destination, a house just inland from Back Bay in Marine Lines.

Then the author, after a silence that had prolonged itself wonderfully, suddenly spoke. "Inspector Ghote, I can no longer conceal it from myself. There is a lacuna."

"Yes?" Ghote asked, misery swiftly descending.

"Inspector, you did not, did you, check Fariqua's alibi with Mr. Rajinder's chauffeur? And I think—I am almost sure—Mr. Rajinder is the man who left on holiday by car three days ago."

"Then I will have to make further inquiries," Ghote said.

But he forced himself to brighten up.

"In any case," he said, "perhaps we shall learn here just where John Louzado is to be found in Goa and then, who knows, a single telephone call to the police there and they would have the fellow behind bars and we would have evidence in plenty, even some of the stolen jewelry if we are lucky."

"Yes," Mr. Reymond said, "but Fariqua's invented story still leaves a loose end."

But the interview at the Marine Lines flat looked from the start as if it were going to be all that Ghote and Inspector Dandekar had been counting on.

"Oh, John, yes," said the deliciously beautiful occupier, Mrs. Akhtar Hazari. "Yes, we should have an address in Goa. Not for John himself but for a priest—John was a Christian—who was to provide a reference. In fact, it was when we heard that John had a criminal record that we decided he must go. My husband imports watches and we often have valuable stock in the flat."

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Ghote was possessed of a sudden feeling that everything in the world was simple. Confidence bubbled in his veins. It would not be as direct a way of wrapping up the case as he had spoken of to Mr. Reymond, but the whole business might still be dealt with inside a few days.

"Of course it was two or three years ago now," Mrs. Hazari said. "But I always seem to keep letters. I will look. Will you take tea?"

So they sat in her big cool sitting room, Ghote on a fat pile of cushions, the Noted British Author swinging rather apprehensively in a basket chair suspended by a chain from the ceiling.

Time passed.

The servant came back and inquired if they would like more tea. Mr. Reymond hurriedly refused for both of them. Ghote would in fact have liked more tea, but even better he would have liked to see that letter.

And then at last Mrs. Hazari returned.

"Inspector," she said, "I must tell you that after all I have not got that letter. I had thought it was in an almirah where I put old papers like that. I even knew exactly the box it should be in. But my memory played me false. I threw out a lot of junk about a year ago, and it must have been in that."

Ghote felt like a child robbed of a sweetmeat. And now, he realised with gritty dismay, he would solemnly have to pursue Mr. Reymond's theory about Fariqua.

"And John came straight to you from Goa?" he asked Mrs. Hazari desolately.

"No," she said. "He did have one short job first. He went to a family where at once the wife died and the man no longer needed so many servants. That was why we took him without a reference. It was a business acquaintance of my husband, I think. And unfortunately he's in Delhi. But if you would give me a ring tonight, I could perhaps tell you then."

With that Ghote had to be content—that and the dubious gain to be had from dealing with Fariqua's final lie.

Happily, by the time they got back to Shivaji Park, Fariqua had left for Andheri, earlier than he should have done but not so much so that there was any reason to suppose he had run off like John Louzado. To placate Mr. Reymond, Ghote sadly confirmed that the Kuldip Singh with whom Fariqua had claimed to be playing cards on the night of the murders had indeed already left Bombay by then.

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Perhaps, Ghote thought as he turned from saying a last good night, down at H.Q. the boy would have broken his obstinate silence and admitted the truth, and there would be no need to pursue next morning this surely—surely?—unsatisfactorily loose end. Or was it a lacuna?

But Inspector Dandekar had no good news. Indeed he seemed considerably worried.

"I had the damned boy in the interrogation room today for eight solid hours," he said. "I have kept him standing up. I have been drinking tea and smoking cigarettes in front of him. I have had a trestle set up and Head Constable Kadam standing there swinging a lathi. But nothing has moved him one inch."

"Inspector," Ghote said with some hesitation, "is it possible that those ropes on his wrists had been altogether badly tied by the real miscreants and not faked?"

Dandekar sat in silence, glaring down hook-nosed at his desk.

"Well, yes, anything is possible," he said at last. "But, damn it, I cannot believe it. I just cannot believe it."

So Ghote was up at Shivaji Park before eight next morning, waiting for the tricky Fariqua and telling himself that there was no reason why the fellow would not come to work as usual.

But the surge of relief he felt when the Muslim did appear made him realize how much he was now expecting everything about the affair to go wrong. He pounced like a kite dropping down on a tree rat.

It did not take long to reduce the fellow to a state of abject fear. And then he talked.

"Aiee, Inspector. No. No, Inspector sahib. I swear to God I had nothing to do with it. Inspector, I just got to know those fellows. We used to sit and talk when I was sleeping here. Inspector, I did not know they were badmash fellows. Inspector, I am swearing to you. And then that night, that one Budhoo—Inspector, he is a really bad one that one, a devil, Inspector—Inspector, he said more than he was meaning.

"He said something was going to happen that night. We were in the kitchen of their flat, Inspector. All of them were out, Sahib, Memsahib, and the boy. I did not know it was going to be murder, Inspector. I thought they had a plan only to take the jewelry, Inspector. They were saying she had jewelry worth one lakh, Inspector. They would hide under a bed. But no more were they telling me.

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"And then they threatened I should stay with them. But after they said I could go, Inspector. Then it was too late to go to Andheri. But Reymond Sahib had his door open still and I was able to creep in. I swear to you, honest to God, Inspector, I am never knowing anything about killing. But they said also that they would kill me if I spoke. Inspector, will you be saving me, is it? Is it, Inspector? Is it?"

Ghote stood looking down at the shrunken cringing figure. Was he letting the fellow trick him again? It did not really seem likely. What he had said this time had been more than simply logical, like the story of cardplaying with the Punjabi's driver. This account of inconclusive talk with two of the murderers in the kitchen of the dead couple's flat had rung true through and through. No wonder the fellow had tried to set up an alibi. Of course, there had been no mention of any involvement by the son. But then the other two would have kept quiet about that. Yes, what he had learned would scarcely help Dandekar.

"You will be safe enough from your friends," he growled at Fariqua. "In the lockup."

Without the rest of them there would not be a case worth bringing even as an accessory before the fact. But there was no harm in having the fellow to hand.

He marched him off.

He gave the Noted British Author the news by telephone—a witness who had heard and not properly heard the criminals' plans—hardly the sort of thing for the pages of *Mr. Peduncle Plays a Joker*. A man induced by threats to join a robbery and then let go before it had begun—not exactly the sort of event for *Mr. Peduncle Hunts the Peacock*.

And indeed questions and doubts poured out so fast that he was reduced at last to pointing out sharply that Mr. Reymond was now without a servant. At that the Noted British Author betrayed signs of disquiet. So Ghote explained he could get a replacement by talking to his neighbors and was rewarded by the author quite hastily ringing off.

Encouraged by this, Ghote hurriedly set out for the address he had got from Mrs. Hazari late the night before. It was, her husband had said, a Mr. Dass whose wife, now dead, had first briefly employed John when he had come to Bombay. He lived in a block of flats in B Road, behind Churchgate.

Climbing up the tiled stairway of the building, Ghote found he

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was retaining, despite the rather shabby air of the place, all his optimism. Louzado's trail had been long, but now it must be near its end. This was, after all, where the fellow had had his first Bombay job. They could go no further back. But it was equally the most likely place for an employer to have noted that crucial Goa address.

On the door of the flat a small tree-slice nameboard had painted on it in much-faded script: *Mr. and Mrs. Gopal Dass.* It must, Ghote reflected, have been a long while since there had been a Mrs. Dass if it was her demise that had brought Louzado's first Bombay job to its abrupt end. And certainly the little irregularly-shaped board had a strong look of dusty neglect.

He rang the doorbell.

There was such a long silence that he almost became convinced he was to experience yet another defeat. He was even turning toward the next-door flat to make inquiries when the door opened by just a crack. He swung round.

"It is Mr. Gopal Dass?"

The door opened a little more. Ghote saw, in the bright light from the room beyond, a man who had once been fat.

Afterward he was able to account in detail for the instantly stamped impression. It had come in part from the old European-style suit, its jacket drooping from the shoulders in deep encrusted folds, the trousers hanging in baggy rucks from the hips. But even the face had shown the same signs—flesh seemed to sag from it.

"What is it you are wanting?"

The voice, too, appeared to be coming from someone no longer there, hollow and without force.

Rapidly Ghote introduced himself and stated his problem. He felt that the slightest chance might cause the tall empty man to close the door so barely opened.

Mr. Dass heard him out. Then he sighed, driftingly like a puff of night breeze with hardly the strength to ruffle lonely waters.

"Oh, no, no," he said. "No addresses. Everything like that went when my wife left me for another life. Everything."

He turned slowly and looked into the room behind him. Ghote saw over his shoulder that it was almost completely bare. No curtains, no carpet, no pictures of the gods. Just a small table with a brass bowl, a brass tumbler, and a packet of Mohun's cornflakes on it, and in a corner a bed-roll.

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"Yes," Mr. Dass said. "I got rid of everything. My life is at an end, you know. At an end."

And very slowly, and without any sense of discourtesy, he turned and closed the door.

And I too, Ghote thought in the thick sadness he felt billowing from the shut door with its once gay tree-slice nameboard, I too have reached an end—the end of my hunt for John Louzado.

But one part of the affair certainly was not over. The Noted British Author would undoubtedly be out pursuing his loose ends before much longer. He might be doing so already. One conversation could well have found a new servant.

Ghote ran clatteringly down the empty echoing stairway, drove out back to H.Q., glancing wildly at Dandekar's office as he came to a gravel-squirting halt, and ran for his telephone.

"Ah, Inspector Ghote."

The British author's enveloping smile seemed to come all the way down the line. "Ah, good. I was just setting out to see you. You're speaking from your office?"

"Yes," Ghote answered. "That is— no. That is . . ."

"There seems to be a bit of a discrepancy," the plummy voice said.

"Not at all," Ghote answered with sharpness. "I am at office, and I shall be here all morning."

But when the Noted British Author arrived, Ghote was magnificently insulated from him. Within two minutes of his call Inspector Dandekar had asked him to take over his interrogation. It had been something of an admission of defeat for Dandekar. He had told Ghote he felt he dared no longer leave unexplored the possible trails in the Bombay underworld. If the boy actually was innocent despite everything, then inquiries through the usual network of informers must be pursued now with extra vigor.

"Mind you," he had concluded, "I still swear young Raju is guilty as hell. I hope you can break him."

So, with Dandekar gossiping to thief acquaintances in such places as the stolen-goods mart of the Chor Bazar and thus safe from any British botheration, Ghote felt perfectly justified in leaving the author to cool his heels.

And in the meanwhile he faced young Raju, cocksure graduate of Bombay University, adopted son of the murdered ice-cream manufacturer, and, as Dandekar had discovered at Shivaji Park, openly mutinous at having been given the fairly humble job in his

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new father's firm of going round to shops and restaurants instead of having a fat sum given him to start a business on his own.

It was with this point that Ghote began.

"Sit down, sit down," he said. "I have been going over your answers to Inspector Dandekar, and there is one small thing I cannot understand. You wanted a sum to start up a business. But it is not at all clear what is the business."

The boy sat down on the hard chair in front of Ghote's table and with deliberate casualness put one leg over the other.

"You are not catching me that way, bhai," he said. "All along I am denying and denying I asked for money."

Ghote sighed.

"But we have a statement from a neighbor to whom you yourself complained," he said. "Two others also heard loud quarreling."

"Lies," Raju answered contemptuously.

Ghote did not let himself be discomposed. But for all the calmness with which he went back to the point and for all the reasonableness of every other question he asked in the next two hours, he got, it seemed, nowhere. Some of the hard and shiny contempt left the boy's voice and the two of them eventually might have been friendly acquaintances, but the answers, though different in tone, were never one whit helpful.

So when a constable came in with a chit saying Inspector Dandekar had returned, Ghote felt decidedly relieved. He had not really hoped for success where Dandekar had failed, but a small gleam in him had licked at the possibility. And now he knew it would not be.

Dandekar he found equally gloomy.

"Nothing," he said in answer to a query about his luck with the informers. "Not a whisper. Of course there may be something still, you know. When the newspapers get onto a case, people hold out. But I did not get one word."

And if you did not, Ghote thought, no one else could

"The boy is also the same as ever," Ghote said. "I talked and cajoled and urged but he did not give one thing, except to stop back-answering."

"That little rat. I am going to have him, Ghote. I am going to get him talking if it is the last thing I do. I am going now."

And, all solidly compact determination, he marched out.

Ghote sat where he was on the small chair beside Dandekar's

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desk. He felt he could not face the waiting British author. He had used every atom of his patience with young Raju. He leaned forward, banged the brass bell on the desk, and when the peon came ordered tea.

He took his time sipping at the hot milky liquid and had not quite finished when suddenly the bat-wing doors clapped back with a noise like a pair of quick pistol shots and Dandekar came striding in again.

But now his face was alight with a dark joy.

"Got him!" he said. "Got him! I knew I would, and by God I did."

Ghote's first feeling—he tried to overcome it—was chagrin. He had had Raju all morning and had ended up where he began; Dandekar had had him for scarcely twenty minutes more and had broken him. But, never mind who had done it, the boy had talked.

"He confessed everything?" he asked Dandekar. "Faking the ropes, planning it all with Louzado, and that Budhoo?"

"Everything. Thanks to you, Ghote."

"To me?"

"Oh, yes. When I heard you had taken that soft line I thought that perhaps now one good hard push would do it. And it did. They did not set out to murder, of course. But when that Budhoo found not one lakh of jewelry but four or five rings only, he went mad. That accounts for all those wounds."

"Shabash, Inspector, shabash," Ghote said, a rush of warmth swirling through him.

But Dandekar, slumping down into his chair, opening a drawer and pulling out a towel to dab his sweaty face, had begun to look less triumphant.

"It is all right, Ghote," he said. "But you know as well as I do that when it comes to court, as likely as not, young Raju will shamelessly deny every word."

"Yes," Ghote said. "We need Budhoo, though we would be lucky ever to find that one. Or we need John Louzado."

He began recounting how that trail had ended. But in a minute a look of wide-eyed staring came on Dandekar's hook-nosed face. Slowly Ghote turned, though he knew almost for a certainty what he would see.

And there it was, looming over the top of the doors like a bristling moon, the face of the Noted British Author.

Resignedly Ghote pushed himself to his feet.

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"Mr. Reymond," he said, his voice ringing with brightness. "I was just coming to tell you. We have broken the case."

But congratulations did not come as freely as he felt they should. Indeed, as out in the sunshine his story progressed, the bushy beard gaped wide more than once with hardly restrained interjections.

Loose ends, Ghote thought. Small lacunas. Significant variations. Surely there could not be more.

And at last he ran out of words and had to face the author's objections.

"Inspector, I feel bound to point out a few things. You and Inspector Dandekar have been most kind to me. I can see that as soon as I get home I shall write a story called *Mr. Peduncle and the Indian Inspector*. And it would be nothing short of a betrayal if I kept silent."

"Most kind. But I assure—"

"No, Inspector, it is the least I can do. First then, let me say that I know young Raju well. He and I often had long talks when he came to phone friends in Delhi and other places. And I promise you, Inspector, he is not the chap to set criminals on to rob his own benefactors. There's a simple discrepancy between what the boy is and what you say he did. But that's not all."

"No?" Ghote said.

"No. You see, there's one piece of the puzzle which still doesn't fit. And time and again my Mr. Peduncle has said to Inspector Sugden, 'You've got to fit in every bit, my dear fellow, every bit of the puzzle.' "

"But—"

"No, Inspector, hear me out. I know this can't be easy for you to take, but you can't get away from pure logic. What you heard from Fariqua this morning simply didn't add up. You've only to think about it. And if he's lying, there can be only one reason. Young Raju wasn't the third man. Fariqua was."

Ghote stood there fuming. Who was this detective-story writer to come telling them what was and was not so? Him and his logic and his small lacunas.

But, even as he encouraged the rage to squirt and bubble inside him, he also felt a streak of cold doubt. Logic. Well, logic was logic. And suspects had been known to confess under pressure to crimes they had not committed, even to murder. And Dandekar, first-class though he was, certainly could put too much pressure on.

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Was it possible that, despite what seemed plain facts, that story of Fariqua's, seemingly unlikely but perfectly in accord with the way things happened, was just a story?

One thing was certain. The shame, the ridiculousness, of having an author of detective books get to the right answer first must not make them ignore that answer. If only they were not relying wholly on that confession but had Louzado or Budhoo in a cell too. If only the trail of addresses had not—

And then, like a last monsoon storm winding rapidly in across the sea long after the monsoon ought to have ended, bringing a last welcome sudden coolness, an idea came leaping into his mind.

"Sir, sir," he said. "Come with me at once, if you please."

And without giving the Noted British Author a chance to reply he bundled him into the car and set off into the darting traffic.

They made it to the Shivaji Park flat in record time. There, still begging for patience, Ghote took one quick look round the sitting room—couches spread with cotton counterpanes, bookshelves, two tables, and, yes, the telephone.

And next to it "the little book" in which, so the Noted British Author had told him soon after they met, people from nearby looked things up. His mention just now of Raju telephoning distant friends had at last brought it to the front of his mind.

Ghote flicked at the indexed pages with sweat-slippery fingers. L for Louzado. And yes. Yes, yes, yes. There it was. The address.

He seized the phone, dialed furiously, shouted instructions for a Lightning Call and miraculously was speaking to the Goa police in Panjim in minutes. And got splendid cooperation. They knew the place, they would find the man, no doubt they would find too his share of the missing rings. The fellow would be behind bars in half an hour.

It was almost as if Ghote was putting a hand on Louzado's shoulder himself.

He turned from the telephone and looked the bursting-bearded British author full in the face.

"Let me tell one thing, sir," he said, savoring the irony to the last drop. "Let me tell one thing: never to neglect a loose end."

"Q"

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Introducing Clement Boore, the world-renowned Pun Detective . . .

THE PUN DETECTIVE

by JON L. BREEN

Clement Boore, the world-renowned Pun Detective, regarded his visitor dolefully. "What did you say your business was, Mr. Cosgrove?"

Freddy Cosgrove looked offended. "You don't know me? I'm an impressionist."

"You paint?"

"No, man, I do impressions of people—imitations. You know. I do the President. I do Bill Buckley. I do Robert Redford—that's a tough one, by the way. But my specialty is Humphrey Bogart."

"Do you do James Cagney? *I* can do James Cagney."

"Please don't, man."

"Also W. C. Fields."

"I can't take it, man. Do you have any idea how many people stop me on the street and do Cagney and Fields for me? I knew a guy once who worked clubs doing perfect, minutely detailed impersonations of George Brent, Robert Young, and John Ireland. But his career went nowhere—people thought he was no good because he didn't do Fields or Cagney. Where's the justice?"

After a pause Clement Boore added hopefully, "I can do Edward G. Robinson."

Freddy Cosgrove held his head. "I don't have time, man. I think somebody is trying to kill me."

"By all means tell me about it," said the Pun Detective, leaning back in his chair in anticipation, relaxing his hanging jowls and prodigious eyebags to give full attention to his guest's story.

"Do you know the facts about this series of murders that's been occurring lately? The newspapers have made a big thing of them."

"The so-called Sports Murders, you mean? Yes, I'm aware of them. The police don't seem to know why they've occurred or what connection there could be among the victims."

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"Do you have any theory on the case?"

"Not as to the motive or the connection, no. However, I have noticed some rather interesting features pertaining to my particular specialty as a Pun Detective."

Cosgrove shook his head. "Pun Detective! What in the world is a Pun Detective anyway? I mean, I came here because you were recommended to me as a skilled operative, but all you want to do is break into vaudeville. It's dead, man, and so will I be soon if somebody doesn't help me."

"Very well, then, let us desist from sparring and get down to the subject at hand. There have been four murders to date, I believe."

"Right, and I knew all three of the victims, and I know the connection among them, and I know who's doing it, and I know I'm the next one to be killed."

"You seem to know a good deal. Are you sure you need me?"

"Yes. I've told the police. But I need to know where the killer is likely to strike at me, so I can take proper precautions—like staying away. My agent, Monty Baby, said you'd be able to tell me."

"Ah, Monty Baby," said the Pun Detective with understanding. "He and I discussed this case at a local tavern recently, and I explained some of my theories to him. Thus, he sent you to me, a wise move. In any event, come out with it—who has been committing these crimes and why?"

Freddy Cosgrove took a deep breath. "The killer's name is George Balin. He was a very promising college athlete about twenty years ago—played three sports at UCLA and was great at all three. But some of us show-business types got to this kid and convinced him that the real payday for him would be as a boxer. The fight game was real big just then—TV, you know, revitalized it, then practically killed it. He had looked real impressive in some amateur bouts, and we thought that with the proper preparation he could be the heavyweight champion.

"The kid went for it, and we were wrong. He wound up with mush for a face and more than slightly punchy—punchy enough to make people stare, but not quite punchy enough not to know what we'd done to him."

"And now he's bumping you off one by one, and they haven't caught him. And I take it there's some reason why you can't just stay away from sports events altogether, since that seems to be his chosen setting for murder."

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"Well, yes, I get lots of offers to do sports benefits—like there's a celebrity golf tournament and a celebrity bowling tournament coming up, and I always like to make the pro football games that are starting up now, and hunting season is just around the corner, and I like to get in some skiing—"

"All right, all right. Let's review the three victims to date. The first was that sky-diving photographer fellow—"

"Right. Andy Schmidt. He was stabbed in the parking lot at a pro basketball game."

"Then there was that cowboy magician, Clarence Westwood."

"Yeah. Poisoned hot dog at a baseball game."

"And what was his favorite trick?"

"Making his horse, Strummer, disappear right on stage. It was a great trick, poor guy."

"And then there was that actor who was shot from ambush while serving as linesman at a tennis match. What was his name?"

"Bill Kolmar. He really had a bad day at that match—the players were on him all day about his calls. And then he got shot."

"Had Kolmar done much acting lately? I don't remember seeing him very much."

"No, he'd retired from acting. Memory problems, he told me. The result of booze problems, I think."

"So that's the three of them, and you were the fourth partner, eh? Well, we obviously have not just a master murderer but a master punster on our hands. And it's pretty obvious to me which sport you should stay away from.

"That sky-diving photographer was killed coming out of a *basketball* game for one reason only: he was famous for his *jump shot*.

"And why was that magician killed at a *baseball* game? Because his most famous trick involved making his *horse hide*.

"And the bad calls by that *tennis* official were caused by the same malady that forced him out of acting: he was *forgetting his lines*. And you, Mr. Cosgrove, would be well advised to stay away from the *golf* course."

"Why the golf course?"

"What did you say your best impression was?"

"Humphrey Bogart."

"Where better than a golf course to get a *Bogey*?"

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 462nd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . to quote Ambrose Bierce again: "Can Such Things Be?" Think it over after you have read this story. Why not?—in this involuted and convoluted world . . .

The author, Robert Cittadino, was twenty-five when he submitted his first story, single, and about to complete his "last year of college in the field of political science." His education "was interrupted by two and a half years in the army as a personnel specialist stationed in Belgium."

Now that you have wet your toes, Mr. Cittadino, take the plunge! . . .

PRIDE IN ONE'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

by ROBERT CITTADINO

December 17, 1974

Mr. Thomas Morton,
555 Spring Street,
Monterey Park, Ca.
Dear Mr. Morton,

I am pleased to inform you that your short story, *Pride in One's Accomplishments*, has been accepted by our magazine. As requested, the story will be published under the pseudonym of Harrison Wesley. Enclosed you will find a check for one hundred fifty dollars ($150). Thank you for your contribution.

Sincerely,
John Wilkenson
Editor of Best Mysteries

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April 7, 1975

Letters to the Editor,
Best Mysteries Magazine

I just had to write about how much I enjoyed *Pride in One's Accomplishments* in your March '75 issue. Unlike most crime stories, the murder of the philandering wife, staged to look like a fatal mugging, was believable and clever. Without a doubt the police would accept the crime at face value (unlike the doubting detectives on TV) and the husband would get away with it. I hope you include stories of equally high caliber in future issues.

George Belcroft
Atlanta, Georgia

April 9, 1975

Letters to the Editor,
Best Mysteries Magazine

I thoroughly enjoyed *Pride in One's Accomplishments* in your March issue. I especially liked the part where the killer fools his secretary with the tape recording of him moving about in his private office, while he actually had snuck out down the back fire escape so he could kill his wife when she arrives in the rear parking lot. What a cold-blooded murderer!

Jason Keetle
Gavis, Texas

April 11, 1975

Letters to the Editor,
Best Mysteries Magazine

As a college student majoring in psychology, I must confess that I was intrigued by the killer portrayed in the story, *Pride in One's Accomplishments*. The author shows remarkable insight by depicting the killer as being unperturbed about the murder and actually obsessed with the desire of letting others know about the brilliance of his crime. There are actual case histories where criminals have been caught due to their compulsion to brag about their deeds. I hope to see other psychologically correct stories in future issues of your magazine. Wesley is a topnotch writer.

Aaron Levine
N.Y.C., N.Y.

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April 12, 1975

Letters to the Editor,
Best Mysteries Magazine

I think *Pride in One's Accomplishments* was one of the best stories I have read in many years. The best part is the surprise ending—where the remorseless killer, frustrated because he cannot brag about his perfect crime, resorts to writing it in the form of a short story and submits it to a mystery magazine! It really left you wondering! What a story!

Lester Zastaway
Trenton, N.J.

April 12, 1975

Letters to the Editor,
Best Mysteries Magazine

Hey, that story by Wesley was really something! That ending, where the killer sends the story to the magazine, was a real twist. It makes you wonder how many of those stories you publish might be for real. Ever think about that, guys?

Hank Walford
Queens, N.Y.

November 17, 1975

Mr. Thomas Morton
555 Spring Street,
Monterey Park, Ca.
Dear Mr. Morton,

I am pleased to inform you that your critically acclaimed story, *Pride in One's Accomplishments*, has been nominated for the Sherlock Holmes Award, short-story category. The winner will be chosen at the Mystery Writers Convention which will be held in Chicago from February 17 through 21. The winner in your category will be awarded a $1,000 first prize. You and your wife are cordially invited to attend at the expense of our magazine. If you accept, the particulars of the trip will be forwarded to you by my staff. Hoping to hear from you soon, I remain

Very truly yours,
John Wilkenson
Editor of Best Mysteries

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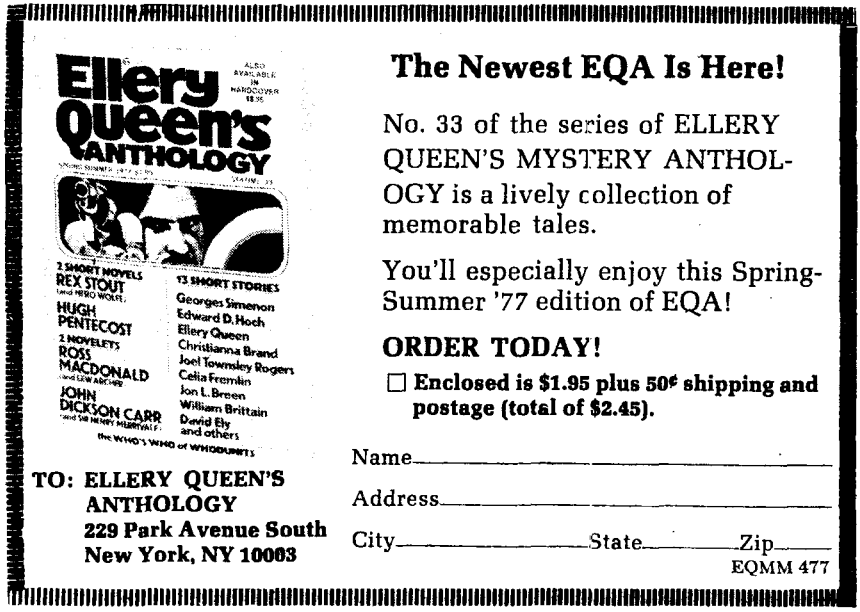
December 3, 1975

Mr. John Wilkenson,
Editor, Best Mysteries Magazine
Mr. Wilkenson,

It is with regret that I must inform you that I will be unable to accept your offer. My story, *Pride in One's Accomplishments*, was successful beyond all my expectations and has brought me to an unexpected end. It seems, unfortunately, that a member of the Los Angeles Police Department is an avid reader of your magazine and my story, though somewhat altered, rang a bell in his memory and reminded him of an actual unsolved case. Let me know who wins in the short-story category.

Very truly yours,
Thomas Morton
Cell 22, Cellblock D, San Quentin

"Q"



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 463rd "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a story of mountain climbing—ascending Borazo, the highest volcano in the Andes—and as tense and taut as the rope connecting the three climbers, two men and a murderer . . .

The author, John Vineyard, is in his late thirties, and has lived in Missouri, Massachusetts, Ohio, and upstate New York. He has been an Instructor of Humanities at the Franklin Institute of Boston, and at the time of this writing, expects to move to Cornell as an Instructor of English. His chief interests include backpacking, mountain climbing, skiing, and harpsichord building . . .

AVALANCHE ALLEY

by JOHN VINEYARD

In the first place, the approach to the mountain took much too long. After two weeks on the glacier, Baker, Gamble, and I finally reached the base of Borazo, the highest unclimbed volcano in the Andes. We were low on food, footsore, and cold.

In the second place, the avalanches were much worse than we had expected. For three days we clung like flies to the South Wall of this terrible mountain while the avalanches roared past us, over us, and beneath us. You could only survive the South Wall of Borazo if you were a perfect team and if you accepted the possibility that at any moment an avalanche might suddenly and without warning erase you from this life.

Baker and I were in the tent, perched on a ledge that sloped dangerously, while Gamble hung in the hammock, supported by pitons and swinging out over oblivion, no doubt praying the pitons would hold. Because the hammock was unrestful, we took turns in the tent. Just before sunset, Gamble had pounded the pi-

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tons into the Wall and cheerfully retired within, zippering himself completely into the orange nylon sack. The last thing he said was, "Hope you guys don't walk in your sleep." It was a transparent attempt to be cheerful.

We drove our tent pegs into snow, over which we poured hot water to freeze them solid. If they failed, a strong gust could pluck us off and drop us onto the glacier that wound like an anaconda 3000 feet below.

Tiny snow crystals filled the deep blue air inside the tent. Baker's face was grizzled, sunburned, chapped. He punched furiously at his sleeping bag to make it warmer. Suddenly he stopped and spoke sarcastically. "You know he wants to kill us, don't you?"

"So do a lot of people."

"I'm serious. I've been thinking about Gamble, and you ought to know what I've figured out." He spoke in a hurried, malevolent tone that caught and surprised me. I listened. "You haven't seen him for what, four-five years? He's done four first ascents since then. He's famous, right? But he made them in the first two years. Do you know where he was from 1973 until this year?"

"I thought he was climbing in the Alps. Didn't you?"

"That's what he wants people to think. He was in the hospital. He fell off this mountain in July, 1973. Two people with him died, Stevens and Davis—famous, careful climbers. He was on lead. You know his story. The rope broke, and he tumbled down trying to belay them. I was always a little doubtful about that. He's too good for that kind of mistake."

"And you think he jumped?"

"No, he fell later, farther up. He found out that by himself he couldn't get over the Wall. Once above that, he knows he can do it alone, and then come down the easy way, along the northeast ridge."

"Why would he do that?"

"He is not the same man you knew before. He wants crazy things. He has been consumed by the passion to be the first and only. With our help he can get onto the shoulder, and then it's only an easy slope to the top. We know any of us could do it alone. But if he gets rid of us just after we come over the Wall, he becomes not only the first to make the top, but the only one."

I stared Baker down and then laughed as much as my parched throat and the thin air would allow, until I brought on a fit of

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coughing. "Come on, did you suddenly learn all this up here? Why didn't you say this before? Take a pill and go to sleep."

"I swear to God, Smith, this is the truth. Why should I sabotage the expedition? I didn't know for sure until we got onto this bloody wall." He fished into his sleeping bag and pulled out a handful of frayed rope. "Here. I found it this afternoon when I was on lead."

"What is it?"

"Don't you see? No one's been on the wall before. This has to be the rope that broke."

"Well? What did he say when you showed it to him?"

"Show it to him! And get us killed? I was about to when I saw it was *cut*. This is thousand-pound-test nylon. It doesn't just break. When they were hanging unbelayed Gamble cut it."

"That's impossible. And what about the other end of the break? Didn't they look at that during the investigation?"

"Investigation? Pete, can you imagine what two men tied together, skidding and wheeling down three thousand feet of jagged rock wall look like when they arrive at the bottom? Everything was torn from their bodies—clothes, packs, boots, socks, skin, and rope. They were mere puddles of bone. I didn't see it, but Gamble's sister told me. She's quite a climber too, you know. This is the rope and this is where it was cut!"

I took it from Baker's hands, propped myself on my elbows, and examined it in the dim cold light. Fortunately, there was no chance of Gamble's hearing us above the wind that was tearing against the Wall. "Damn, it *was* cut. Maybe you have something. I've seen him take some long chances, talk a little funny, but I blamed it on the altitude."

"We're safe now, but as soon as the hard part is beneath us he's going to kill us."

"We just won't give him the lead until then."

"How can we do that without making him suspicious? No. He'll try something else—poison our tea if he has to. We've got to be watching every second."

The wind roared much louder and buried his words with a furious flapping of tent walls.

Until now I had felt supremely self-confident, but Baker had climbed more than I. He knew Gamble better and he had more experience in the Andes. I felt suddenly dependent on his wisdom. When he was sure that I was fully frightened by the thought of

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having a murderer among the three of us, he turned over and went to sleep. More talk was impossible. The wind snatched away everything we said.

In the morning it was dead-still. Six eleven. Baker was still asleep. I crawled out of my mummy bag, puffing against the cold, and pulled my boots on. They were almost frozen. I pulled on mittens, hat, extra windbreaker, and put a lemon candy in my mouth.

Outside, the air cut like ice. The sun was probably just rising behind the mountain. Gamble was already up, working at the propane stove, melting snow to make coffee. When the sun came over the mountain, the air would warm rapidly and we would be in avalanche alley again.

Gamble greeted me as usual with a nod and a grin, then turned quickly back to his work, snapping his lighter above the gas jet, then shifting stones and blocks of ice to improve the wind shield for our precious flame. There was a catlike expertise in his movements which I noticed for the first time. When I studied his face I told myself that indeed I did not know him at all. He had been entirely different in the Rockies. Here, the calculating quickness of his movements frightened me.

Soon the three of us were drinking tea and chewing breakfast squares. We said little. Every so often I stole a glimpse of the Wall towering above, wondering how I had talked myself into this. Borazo was bigger than ever. A tiny white plume of snow was blowing toward us from the top of the Wall.

In an unseen crevice far above a rattling began. It grew louder. A jet of gravel roared down from the ledge above our heads, missing us because of the overhang, and then ceased.

"Better move," said Gamble.

We were good at packing up. Within 15 minutes we were strung out again on the Wall, with 50 feet of rope between us, moving like an inchworm. Baker had the lead, I was second, Gamble third. Baker had a tendency to use too many pitons, and I worried that we might run out of them, but I said nothing. Gamble climbed with great style. I paused, got his gap-toothed grin, and took his picture with my mini-camera.

Then another rumble began, like water boiling over. I looked up and got a few grains of sand in my eyes.

"Hey, this sounds like a big one," Gamble shouted cheerfully. Baker was out of sight above me.

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The rumble continued long and steady. Then, in a terrifying instant, beginning 50 feet to my right, the whole mountain began dissolving, yards and yards of it, a torrent of rock and ice and snow. When it was over, the ledge we had camped on was gone, replaced by a howling gulf that cut deep into the mountain. Had it come a day sooner we would have been blocked and forced to retreat.

"That was exactly what we needed," shouted Gamble.

"What do you mean?"

"This route is sealed. No one can come this way again."

"Damned fools if they try," said Baker.

"I could have got around it, though," said Gamble. "Might need another day, but I could have made it."

"We wouldn't have another day," I pointed out. "We may be hungry the last two days as it is."

Gamble replied with a shrug as if mere hunger was of small concern to him. Baker gave me a glance that said, "You see what I mean? The man's inhuman." I shook my head, both to acknowledge his observation and to keep him from saying something that would make Gamble suspicious.

In the afternoon the Wall became easier. I took a long stretch at the lead, stalling Gamble's turn as long as I dared. After he took it, the rock became suddenly rotten, and steeper. I felt more than once he was choosing the most difficult passages just to show off.

We entered a steep, twisting chimney down which the wind poured so hard that in gripping, our mittens froze to the rock.

After three hours of agony we conquered the chimney and found ourselves on a pitiful ledge. Above, the Wall loomed outward, hard as glass. There seemed to be no route at all, so we made camp. It was my turn to be in the tent with Gamble that night. I let him crawl in while I attempted to tighten the pins. It was the highest I had ever been, well above 20,000 feet.

We were high enough now to need rest every few steps. I felt as though a spike were being driven between my eyes. I looked up again into the deepening indigo sky. At the very top of the Wall there seemed to be a jagged overhanging shelf crowned with heavy cornices of snow. The entire ledge looked like an enormous trap some giant had set for us.

It was dark now and the avalanches were quiet. I crawled into the tent, where Gamble was taking a last look-see with his

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flashlight at the aerial photographs.

"Find a way?" I asked dumbly. He ignored me for a long time. I feebly crawled into the sack, puffing on my numb fingertips, glancing at him whenever I was sure he would not notice. He had taken the uphill side of the ledge.

"I've got it," he said, sounding dead-sure.

"Show me."

"Here we are." He pointed toward a tiny groove winding upward in the very center of an enormous desert of steepness. "Here. Up this chimney, and traverse way over here, then around the ice, and *back,* this way. There's a crack in the top ledge here. We'll shinny up the last stretch like cats up a tree."

"You sound as if you know it already."

"In a way you're right. I know this mountain's soul, I can feel its rhythm. I can feel whatever she's about to throw at us."

I could only stare at the invisible trace he had made, because there was nothing solid for my eye to rest on—nothing but perfect glaring ice and rock. "But that's no route at all," I protested. "Let me see that again."

"Here." I took it from him and pretended to be studying carefully, when in fact I could see no way up at all. Normally we let Gamble do the map work, he's better at it, but this time he seemed to be asking us to stand on our noses. I attempted to recreate the trace from the minute cracks and spots on the Wall. "You want to do this chimney, and then take that ledge here?"

"No, you couldn't possibly! *This* ledge, and then the chimney takes you right on through all that stuff. Oh, it'll be good. Nobody down below has any idea how tricky this really is." He was full of excitement. His eagerness only grew as obstacles multiplied. He seemed not only to be happy risking death, as anyone does on Borazo, but to be inviting it for all of us. "There's only one problem I can see."

"What's that?"

He whispered, "It's Baker."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't think we can count on him. I think he's a danger to us. Did you see the way he was leading this afternoon? He's already out of his element, beyond his abilities. He's just barely hanging on. He slipped three times on the same piece of ice, easy stuff you or I could do with one hand tied. He's not acclimated. He's slowing us down."

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"Should we hold up here a day and try to rest?"

"You know as well as I do that at this altitude you don't get stronger. You only weaken. Above nineteen thousand feet it's a long slow slide toward death, and worse the longer you stay. If you haven't got it with you when you arrive, you haven't got it."

"Yes, he's probably the weakest of us, but he doesn't fade. He plugs on."

"Complaining all the way. You should have heard all the bitching he was doing about your ropework and your step cutting when you had the lead. The man's a festering sore. I can't concentrate with him whining all the time. He's off balance emotionally and mentally from the altitude. Did you see him pitching rocks off the edge after dinner? That dim crazy look in his eye scares me. He'll be holding the rope for us both some time and then just drop us and wander off into the clouds by himself. I know him better than you do, Pete. We've got a problem."

"What do you propose?" I said guardedly.

He paused. "I think our choices are dwindling. In fact, with the way the Wall looks now, we don't have any choice. We have to get rid of him."

"And how do you plan to do that?" I had to note every word, study every wavering of his expression, to see if he was crazy.

"Somewhere above he fails to belay himself properly. He's in the lead. We've been talking to him, trying to keep him alert, but the altitude has got him, and he's going seedy fast. An avalanche comes and he's in its path. He won't duck or else can't hear our cries. It sucks him in. We'll all be swept down unless we cut the rope, so we cut, and thank God the avalanche doesn't reach us too. That's what we tell the authorities, and they have to believe us. In point of fact, while he's swinging up behind you some time, we'll just slice him free."

"Isn't that something like what happened to you the last time you were here?" I asked.

"Oh, no, not at all. I was on lead, Magruder second, not belayed as he should have been, and Mahoney was on traverse and slipped off the mountain. The rope spanged tight, and Magruder's belay gave. My belay should have held them both, but when the second length went taut it scraped a sharp ledge and broke. I worked the equations afterward. It's perfectly easy to see why it happened. Rope has different characteristics when cold under tension—frays like an old sock, only all at once. It was the most terrible thing

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that ever happened to me. We passed the spot where it happened yesterday."

He spoke as if speaking to a crowd. I cleared my throat. "You may be interested to know that Baker found the rope."

"He *what?*"

"You mean he really didn't show it to you?"

"What did he say about it?" he said, making an effort to regain his calm, glib tone.

I could see I had miscalculated. I wanted to scare Gamble, not panic him.

"What did he say about it?"

"You know, now that I think about what you said, I'm inclined to agree with you about Baker," I said. "He sliced off the frayed end, he must have, because he said that it hadn't snapped, but that you cut it from above, that you wanted them to fall. Can you imagine that!"

I laughed, but I'm not a good actor. I looked at Gamble and could feel the falseness in my voice. If he detected it he did not let on.

His voice was perfectly flat. "You should have told me this before. Why did you wait a whole day?"

"I—I didn't want to bring on any more trouble than we already have. I didn't believe him, of course. I didn't believe he was himself. I thought it would pass."

"What made you so certain that he cut the rope and not I?" said Gamble, with a queer tone.

"Well—because I believed your story. Why would you have done something like that?" I felt like a cornered rat—fighting, furious, terrified, but I dared not reveal any of this.

Gamble laughed, reached out, and whomped me on the shoulder. "You're a good man," he said, as if he had some ultimate right to judge me, "and I believe I can trust you." Then he rolled over and went to sleep.

But I did not. I lay awake all night trying to figure out which of them was lying to me.

The morning was uncannily calm. I wandered through the ritual of breakfast. I was bone-weary, but Baker and Gamble seemed bright and well-rested. It was my first real touch of the altitude.

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While Gamble was scraping out the pots and plates, Baker sidled up to me with a kind of leering grin. "He's going to try it tomorrow."

"How do you know? You said he would wait until we got him over the hardest part."

"This is it. The last part of the Wall is a piece of cake. I figured it out last night."

"What about the ledge at the top?" I whispered.

"The ledge? It's nothing. He doesn't want you to find out, but he's got his eye on a snow cornice between two peaks. Look." He checked to be sure Gamble wasn't watching. "See that?" He pointed at the towering battlements above us that always seemed taller and higher and more impregnable the higher we got. "See the snow bridge? You don't have to climb out over anything. You just chop right up through the snow. Ten feet and you're onto the final slope. A piece of cake. We have to get him before then. Shh."

He twisted away and began fastening the drawstrings on his pack as Gamble looked up. There was a moment of curiosity and then a quick level stare. He had seen us and was wondering what Baker had said. I grinned, shrugged, making the sign for "screwy," pointed at Baker, and walked back to roll up the tent.

That should have put him off. It was maddening. I could not let either of them see me talking with the other without having to invent an elaborate explanation. I could imagine Gamble catching me on some fabrication and turning on me farther up.

We packed and began the most arduous morning of my life. By eleven, however, the rock had changed to a more tractable sandstone that easily took pins and belays. There were good natural chimneys and handholds not shown on the photos. What seemed before to be the most hazardous part of the Wall turned out to be pleasant work. The wind stayed low all afternoon, and the avalanches were mostly beneath us now.

"We're above it all now except for the big one," said Gamble cheerily. "Either it lets us over and we're heroes, or it all cuts loose and they never find a trace of us. Anybody care to place a bet?"

I did not like the way he relished this thought. We had come much farther than we expected. Late in the afternoon we found an accommodating snow shelf perhaps 400 feet below the great ledge, and camped on it.

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This time I was alone in the hammock while the two of them filed into the tent, as edgy with each other as two tomcats. I zippered in and prepared for a long sleepless night, as always in the hammock. Soon the wind came up strong and swung me, first out over the void, and then hard against the mountain. This gave me more time to reflect on them, but there was nothing else to do.

Baker intended for us to cut Gamble from the rope first thing in the morning; Gamble simply wanted to gang up and push Baker off the cliff at breakfast while he was lighting the fire. I just wanted to survive, be the first to conquer the South Wall of Borazo, and get home to a real bed with Gamble's real sister in it.

Gamble didn't know how friendly she and I had become in the month of preparations in Esquamila. Better for me if he never finds out, I mused, considering what I know about him now. But Baker knew! I had told him all about her before we left, while I was in some romantic daze, thinking the old ties were still as strong. That was a tactical error.

What if Baker were telling Gamble about me and her now? Did Baker know of their incestuous relationship? She had sworn me to secrecy, glad as she had been to find some relief from her brother's unceasing attentions. No, Baker would tell him about it, and Gamble would be furious, and Baker would misunderstand, and think I had not been open with him.

Baker would begin to think I had been lying to him up here, and he'd be right. He would be furious, and this would change everything. Perhaps the two would make cause against me during the night. How the pounding of my hammock seemed to underline this danger! I was dizzy, I was seasick, and soon I was sure I could hear their voices in the wind, confiding, snickering, concocting evil plans, climbing out of their tent, perhaps even standing with wild and calculating eyes this moment, watching my precarious bed, wondering how to make it even more precarious.

For an age I lay shivering, going over my thoughts, planning the next day through step by step, to the moments when each of them meant to commit murder and then take the summit, getting one-half instead of only one-third of the glory.

No, it wouldn't work that way. By morning, they would see me as the enemy and have some plan to do me in before we reached the great ledge. Hadn't they proved themselves vicious enough for such a plan? Didn't Gamble now have plenty of reason to hate me? Until now danger had kept us from each other's throats. Now

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this treacherous mountain had gone soft and turned us against each other. I could almost feel their joy as they anticipated a quick romp to the summit before lunch.

So I climbed out of the hammock, clinging to the cliff, moving on my fingers and toes. I worked my way to the stove that lay between the hammock and the tent. Oblivious of the cold, I lit the stove and set the pressure cooker on it full of snow. I carefully tuned the flame, not feeling the cold at all, guarding the flame from the wind.

In ten minutes I had a half a pot full of hot water. I piled in more snow and then began loosening their tent pins. I poured water on all of them, so that when they were loose the whole tent depended on one remaining line which I could cut at will.

I poured out the last of the water as if it were liquid gold, then slashed the rope and jammed the tent with both feet.

Their bodies slammed together. The tent collapsed over them. There were groans. Their weight had frozen the ground cloth to the ledge. Gamble's face appeared for an instant in the front. I kicked him inside. They both began struggling and calling my name.

I kicked in a perfect frenzy, slowly getting movement, knowing there was no retreat, no survival if I failed. Both of them were screaming absurdly, terribly, making an unearthly echo that hung along the Wall for the longest time.

And then it was over. Everything suddenly slipped and vanished without a sound.

My heart soon quieted down. I felt safe for now, safe for the first time on this mountain, safe from avalanches, safe from their twisted imaginings, and Borazo was mine alone! You cannot possibly imagine the glory of that feeling. I squeezed back into the hammock and slept soundly for the first time in a week.

In the morning things were different. Just as I imagined, they had plotted against me and had thrown my gear off the mountain while I lay worrying in the hammock. All their gear had been inside their tent. I had no iceaxe, no rope, no mittens, no food, no spare fuel, no maps, no pitons, not even a match—in short, no chance of ever getting down alive.

I frantically searched the camp for anything they might have left, but there was nothing except the stove, a pencil lying in the snow, and this pad of paper.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 464th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a story with a private and personal chuckle — you'll see why we couldn't resist it . . .

The author, Gregory G. Chapman, was twenty-six when he submitted his first story. He has "worked at various jobs including service station attendant, security guard, neon and plastic sign repairman, and currently as a proofreader on the local newspaper." His hobbies are chess, collecting out-of-print and hard-to-find books, and gardening . . .

MAN WITH A PROBLEM

by GREGORY G. CHAPMAN

Dear Mr. Queen:

It's the same wherever I go. No, I take that back. So long as I confine myself to amusement parks, public beaches, and the like, everything is just dandy. But I tremble—yes, *tremble*—when I have to make reservations for dinner, or the theater, or a plane. And as for traffic tickets—well, they're really bad. Usually it goes something like this:

"You were traveling pretty fast there, sir."

"Uh, yes, Officer. It's just that I'm very late for work (or whatever)."

"I'm sorry, sir. Can I have your name, please?"

"Look, Officer. I admit it, I exceeded the speed limit. It's just that this new—you've heard all this before, haven't you?"

"Afraid so, sir," he says, smiling slightly. "And I understand. But—"

"I know," I sigh. "You *have* to give me a ticket."

"Uh huh," he says apologetically. "I do. Now," briskly, "what was your name, sir?"

I surrender. "Queen."

"First name?"

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"Ellery."

"Uh huh. Sure. And I'm Nero Wolfe. Let me see your driver's license, wise guy."

It's been like that all my life.

I was born in Ohio in 1950, and my father (whose name was Leonard Queen) was a great admirer of yours. I hate my father for that. Because of that my life has been sheer hell. For years.

Not at first, though. At first it was great fun. When I entered Junior High I was really popular. I was going steady, then. My girl friend was a really nice person. Friendly, intelligent, and pretty. Need I tell you her name? Nicola Porter—but, of course, she was called "Nikki." But we were proud of it. We got invited to most of the parties in Columbus, on the condition that I'd play the detective in the "Murder Game." I got pretty good at it. I began to feel that inheriting your name wasn't the worst thing that could happen to a guy. But I was wrong.

Boy, was I wrong.

You see, I wanted to be a writer. Worse than that, I wanted to be a mystery writer. But do you think any editor in his right mind would even consider publishing one of my stories signed by my real name? No way, man. They admitted (in handwritten rejection slips) that my stories were everything a saleable, publishable, readable, story should be. But my name. There already *is* an Ellery Queen (as if I didn't know). Would I consider changing my name?

Hell, no. It's *my* name, isn't it?

So I work in a factory.

We moved to California in 1970—my parents and I, that is. Forcing me to bid a tearful, loving farewell to my girl-next-door. And I started work at Olympic Fastening Systems, Inc., a factory in Downey. We went through the usual "Well, Maestro, you looking for the guy that stole the celery out of my lunch box?" bit. After something like that everything calmed down and I began to enjoy my work. At five bucks an hour, I'd better.

Of course, I had to put up with being nicknamed the "Mice" (short for the Maestro) but there were worse nicknames. Then one memorable night I really goofed. I was telling my supervisor, Mr. Lenahan, how I'd always wanted to be a writer but I couldn't even sell one story because of my name.

"Why not use a pen name?" he suggested.

I sighed. Then I opened my mouth to explain why I didn't. Then

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a thought struck me. Why not use a pen name? At least I'd be getting paid for something I really wanted to do. "Sure!" I said enthusiastically. "Why not! Mr. Lenahan, you're a genius! What pen name do you suggest?"

"How about Barnaby Ross?" he said, and walked away, laughing like a maniac.

I tell you, life ain't easy for a boy named Queen.

But that's nothing to bother a busy man like you. I don't want sympathy, I'm used to this. What I want, Mr. Queen, is help. Here's my problem:

Two days ago Nikki appeared on a surprise visit. I was overjoyed. I took her to Disneyland, and Knott's Berry Farm, and I made plans to take her to Lion Country Safari. I saw the world through rose-colored glasses. Everything was perfect. I proposed, she accepted, and last night we went out to dinner to celebrate.

"Oh, Ellery," she said, in her breathless way. "I can't get over how tanned and handsome you've become since you moved out here."

"Why, thank you, Nikki," I said. "Er—you've become quite a looker yourself."

"You really think so?" she asked happily.

"Just to the Queen's Taste," I joked, and we both laughed.

"Excuse me, sir," said a well-dressed middle-aged Incarnation of Doom at the next table. "But I couldn't help overhearing—is your name Ellery Queen?"

"Er—yes," I admitted.

"Nonsense," said his wife. "You don't look a thing like Jim Hutton."

"No," I snapped irritably. "I don't look like Peter Lawford or George Nader either."

"Be quiet, Marsha," said her husband, before she could reply. "You are Ellery Queen, then," he went on. "*The* Ellery Queen?"

"Well—" I began.

"My name is Joseph Cunliffe," he went on, without giving me a chance to explain. "My daughter Susan was kidnaped two weeks ago. I want you to find her, Mr. Queen."

"But—but what about the police?" I suggested. "Why don't you go to them? That's what they're there for."

"Mmmrph. We did. Two weeks without even one lead. And the longer it takes—" He stopped, his eyes filling with tears.

"I see your point," I said sympathetically. "But I'm afraid—"

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"I'll pay you ten thousand dollars, Mr. Queen," he said. "Won't you help us?"

"Er—uh—well—" I mumbled.

"Of course he will," interrupted a bright girlish voice.

"Nikki!" I exclaimed.

"Don't be silly, El," she went on blithely. "You'd love to help them. He'd love to help you."

"Thank you," Cunliffe said with relief. "For both of us. Here's my address, Mr. Queen. We'll be expecting you tomorrow morning. About nine, if that's agreeable to you."

"Oh, he'll be there," Nikki chirped.

I said nothing. I was trying hard not to go to pieces right there.

"Thank you again," he said, and they left.

I sat there, dazed, while Nikki chattered gaily about her plans for all that money.

Well, that's it, Mr. Queen. Here's my question: *What do I do now?*

Yours in desperation,
The other Ellery Queen

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a NEW Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

It's time for another monthly meeting of the Black Widowers, so pull up a chair, name your preference, and join the festivities. The postprandial problem is different this time. Author Isaac Asimov has added something new—a problem that has tremendous political implications. But not everything at this criminological causerie is new. Henry, "the incomparable waiter," the man of "imperturbable efficiency," still has his remarkable "faculty for seeing the obvious." Obvious? Well, if you say so, Henry . . .

THE SPORTS PAGE

by ISAAC ASIMOV

"Is 'blain' an English word?" asked artist Mario Gonzalo, as the company of the Black Widowers sat down to their monthly banquet.

"Brain?" asked James Drake, the organic chemist, scraping his chair toward the table, and looking over the selection of bread and rolls.

"Blain," said Gonzalo sharply.

"How do you spell it?" asked Roger Halsted, a teacher of mathematics, who had no difficulty in deciding to take two slices of pumpernickel.

"What's the difference how it's spelled," said Gonzalo in annoyance. He placed his napkin carefully over his lightly striped and definitely pink trousers. "Spell it any way you want. Is it an English word?"

Thomas Trumbull, the code-and-cipher expert and host for the evening, furrowed his bronzed forehead and said, "Damn it, Mario, we've had a pretty sensible session so far. What's all this about 'blain'?"

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"I'm asking you a question. Why don't you answer it?"

"All right. It's not an English word."

Gonzalo looked around the table. "Everyone agree 'blain' isn't English?"

There was a hesitant chorus of agreement. Even writer Emmanuel Rubin, his eyes magnified by his glasses and his straggly beard a bit shorter than usual, finally muttered, "No such word."

Lawrence Pentili, who had arrived as Trumbull's guest, and who was an elderly man with sparse white hair, and with muttonchop side-whiskers grown long, smiled and said, "Never heard the word."

Only Geoffrey Avalon, a patent lawyer, held his peace. Sitting bolt upright as always, he frowned and with his middle finger stirred the ice in the unfinished half of his second drink.

"All right," said Gonzalo, "we all agree it's not an English word. You can see that in a second. But *how* do you see it? Do you go through a list of all the English words you know and see that 'blain' isn't on the list? Do you check the sound for familiarity? Do you—"

Halsted's soft voice interrupted. "No one knows how human recall works, so why ask? Even people who have theories about how the mechanism of memory works don't understand how information can be fished out once it has been inserted. Every word I use has to be recalled from my vocabulary, and each is there when I need it."

Trumbull said, "There are lots of times when you can't think of the word you want."

Halsted had just turned with satisfaction to the turtle soup which Henry, the incomparable waiter of the Black Widowers, had placed before him. Halsted said, "Yes, and that upsets you. Most people take it big when they can't think of a word, get very upset, as though something has gone wrong which shouldn't have gone wrong. Me, I tend to stutter when I can't think of a word."

Now at last Avalon's deep baritone sounded, and dominated the table. "Well, wait now. As a matter of fact, there *is* such a word as 'blain.' It's archaic, but it's English. It's some sort of animal ailment, or blister."

"Right," said Gonzalo, with satisfaction. "The word is used in the Bible in connection with the plagues of Egypt. I knew someone here would remember it. I thought it would be Manny."

Rubin said indignantly, "I thought you meant *current* English."

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"I didn't say so," said Gonzalo. "Besides, it's part of the word 'chilblain' and that's current English."

"No, it's *not,*" said Rubin, heating up further, "and besides—"

Trumbull said loudly, "Don't get defensive, Manny. What I want to know is how Mario knows all this. —And incidentally, we're having finnan haddie tonight at my request and if anyone here doesn't like it, he can negotiate with Henry for a substitute. —Well, Mario?"

Gonzalo said, "I read it in a psychology book. There's nothing that says I have to be born knowing everything, the way Manny claims he's been. I pick up knowledge by keeping my eyes and ears open. And what I want to do now is make a point. Remembering too well is dangerous."

"It's a danger you'll never face," muttered Rubin.

Gonzalo ignored the joke, and said, "Look, I asked a question and I got a quick response from everyone here but Jeff. He was uncertain and hesitated because he remembered too much. He remembered the use of 'blain' in the Bible. Well, human beings are faced with choices every minute. There has to be a decision and the decision has to be based on what he knows. And if he knows too much, he'll hesitate."

"And so?" asked Drake who, having speared some of the finnan haddie on his fork and placed it in his mouth, looked first thoughtful and then satisfied.

"So that's bad," said Gonzalo. "In the long run what counts is a quick response and action. Even a less than good decision is better than indecision, most times. That's why human beings have evolved an imperfect memory. Forgetting has survival value."

Avalon smiled and nodded. "That's not a bad notion, Mario," he said, with perhaps a trace of condescension. "Have I ever told you my theory of the evolutionary value of contentiousness?"

But Gonzalo held up both arms. "I'm not finished, Jeff. Don't you all see that's why Henry here does so much better than we do in solving the puzzles that arise from time to time? Every one of us here at the table practices being deep—"

"Not everybody," said Rubin, "unless you're about to start."

Gonzalo ignored him again. "Henry doesn't. He doesn't gunk his mind with irrelevant information, and as a result he can see clearly."

Henry, who was clearing some of the excess dishes, said gently, "If I may interpose, Mr. Gonzalo, I'm afraid that whatever I do

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could not be done were it not that you gentlemen usually eliminate all that would otherwise confuse me." His unlined, sixtyish face showed only imperturbable efficiency as he next poured several refills of the white wine.

Trumbull said, "Mario, your theory is junk and, Henry, that false modesty is unbecoming to you. You have more brains than any of us, Henry, and you know it."

"No, sir," said Henry. "With respect, the most I'll admit is that I have a faculty for seeing the obvious."

"*Because*," said Gonzalo, "you don't have the difficulty of trying to look at the obvious through layers of irrelevancies."

Henry bowed his head slightly, but Pentili, the guest, perked up. His eyes followed Henry thoughtfully.

Waiting for the precise moment when the desserts had been eaten and when several of the coffee cups were about ready for refilling, Trumbull tapped his water glass with a spoon and announced it was time for the grilling.

"Since I am host," he said, "I am delighted to be disqualified as griller. Mario, you did all that preaching over the soup. Why don't you grill our guest?"

Gonzalo said, "Dee-lighted" and cleared his throat ostentatiously. "Mr. Pentili, how do you justify your existence?"

Pentili smiled broadly so that a round little ball of flesh bunched up over each cheekbone, giving him the look of a beardless Santa Claus in mufti. "Thank heaven, I no longer have to. I'm retired and I have either already justified my existence or have already failed."

"And in the days when you might have been justifying it, what were you doing to make your existence possible?"

"Breathing. —But if you mean how did I make my living, I served Uncle Sam in the same fashion, more or less, that Tom does."

"You were a cipher expert?"

"No, but I was involved in intelligence."

"And *that* justified your existence?" put in Rubin.

"Shall we argue the point?" said Pentili agreeably.

"No," said Trumbull. "It's been argued fifty times. Go ahead, Mario."

Gonzalo looked eager. "The last time Tom had a guest here, the guest had a problem. Do you have one?"

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"At the present time, certainly not. I leave problems to Tom and the others these days. I'm a more or less happy observer. But I have a question, if I may ask one."

"Go ahead."

Pentili said, "You had said that Henry—who, I take it, is our waiter—"

Trumbull said, "Henry is a valued member of the Black Widowers and the best of us all."

"I see. But I take it that Henry solves puzzles. What kind?"

A shade of uneasiness crossed Henry's face but disappeared almost at once. He said, "Some questions arise at one time or another on the occasion of these banquets, sir, and the members have been able to propose answers."

"*You* have proposed them," said Gonzalo energetically.

Avalon raised his hand. "I protest. Everything said here is entirely confidential, and we ought not to talk about previous sessions in front of our guest."

"No, no," said Pentili, shaking his head. "I ask for no confidences. It just occurred to me that, if it were appropriate to do so, I could pose a problem to Henry."

Gonzalo said, "I thought you said you didn't have a problem."

"I don't," said Pentili, twinkling, "but I once had a problem, sixteen years ago, and it was never solved to my satisfaction. It is of no importance any longer, you understand, except as an irritating grain of sand inside the tissues of my curiosity."

"What was that, Larry?" asked Trumbull with sudden interest.

"You had just entered the department, Tom. It didn't involve you. —Or almost anyone, but me."

"May we hear it?" said Gonzalo.

"As I said," Pentili went on, "it's entirely unimportant and I assure you I had not meant to bring it up. It was just that when mention was made specifically of Henry's facility with—"

Henry said softly, "If I may be allowed a word, sir. I am not the expert at solving puzzles that Mr. Gonzalo is kind enough to think me. There have been occasions when, indeed, I have been helpful in that direction but that has only been after the membership has considered the problem and eliminated most of what was not essential. If, in that case, some simple thread was left exposed, I could pick it up, but I can do no more than that."

"Oh." Pentili looked abashed. "Well, I'm perfectly willing to present the problem to the whole membership."

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"In that case, sir," said Avalon, "we are all ears."

Pentili, having finished his brandy and having declined a second one, said, "I will ask you, gentlemen, to cast your mind back to 1961. John F. Kennedy was in the first months of his tragically abbreviated administration and an invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles was being planned. Kennedy had inherited those plans and had refused to chance the repercussions of having the invaders granted American air support. He was assured by intelligence reports that the Cuban populace would rise in support of the invaders. A free Cuban government would quickly be formed and at *its* request, the United States might move.

"It is easy, in hindsight, to realize how wretchedly we had underestimated Castro's hold on his army and his people, but at the time we saw everything through an optimistic haze. You all know what happened. The invaders landed at the Bay of Pigs and were met at once by well-organized Castroites. The Cuban people did *not* rise and in the absence of air support, the invaders were all either killed or taken prisoner. It was a tragic affair for them and an embarrassing fiasco for the United States. Kennedy accepted the responsibility since he was President and had given the final kickoff signal. Although others were clearly more to blame, no one stepped forward to take his medicine. As Kennedy said, 'Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan.' "

Rubin, who had been staring at his coffee cup, said suddenly, "I remember that. At the time Kennedy said it it was an old saying, but no one, to my knowledge, has ever discovered the source. It will have to go into the quotation books with Kennedy's name under it."

Avalon cleared his throat. "A defeat or even a humiliation does not stand alone in time. Smarting from the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy was determined not to submit again, so the next year he faced down the Soviets on the Cuban missiles affair and won our greatest victory of the Cold War."

Rubin said, with vehemence, "And victories don't stand alone, either. President Johnson, determined not to appear less *macho* than his predecessor, led us step by step into the quagmire of Vietnam and this led to our—"

"Look here," interrupted Trumbull. "This isn't a contemporary history class. We're listening to Larry Pentili."

In the sudden silence that followed, Pentili said, with a bit of

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gloominess flitting over his face, "Actually, it is all pertinent. You see, the real villain of the Bay of Pigs affair was faulty intelligence. Had we accurately known the situation in Cuba, Kennedy would have canceled the invasion or approved air support. In that case, there would have been no fiasco to give either Castro or Khrushchev the false notion that they could get away with establishing missile sites ninety miles off Florida and then, if we accept Rubin's psychohistorical interpretation, there would have been no Vietnam.

"And in my opinion, information may *not* have been faulty. We had one operative who had been planted in Cuba and who was back in Washington about half a year before the Bay of Pigs—with reports he had been unable to radio out—"

"Why not?" said Gonzalo, at once.

"Because he was playing a difficult role and dared not take the risk. He was a Soviet agent, you see, and his whole value to us was that the Soviets allowed him to travel to the United States freely and to circulate in Washington freely because they thought he was spying on us for them."

"Maybe he was," said Drake, peering through his cigarette smoke. "How can you tell which side a double agent is fooling?"

"Maybe both sides," said Halsted.

"Maybe," conceded Pentili, "but the Soviets never discovered anything more than we deliberately permitted this Russian to reveal. On the other hand, through him we learned a great many useful things that the Soviets could not conceivably have wanted us to know."

"I wonder," said Rubin, with something more than a trace of sarcasm in his voice, "if the Soviets might not have reasoned in precisely the same way."

"I don't think so," said Pentili, "for in the end it was the Soviets who eliminated him. How they caught on to him, how he had given himself away, we never discovered, but it was clear that the Soviets finally came around to agreeing with us that he was essentially our Russian, not theirs. Too bad, but, of course, from their standpoint he was a traitor."

Avalon said, "Frankly, I would hesitate to trust a traitor. A man who betrays once can betray again."

"Yes," said Pentili, "and for that reason he never knew anything more than it was considered safe for him to know. Yet I, for one, *did* trust him. It was always my opinion that he chose us be-

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cause he came to believe in the American ideal. During the three years he worked with us, he never gave us any ground for concern.

"His name was Stepan and he was an earnest man, rather humorless, who went about his task with conscious dedication. He was determined to learn idiomatic English and to speak it with an American accent. He was therefore a faithful listener to news programs not for their contents but for the sanitized pronunciations of men like Walter Cronkite. To develop his vocabulary, he worked on crossword puzzles, with indifferent success, and was very fond of the word game called Scrabble, at which he usually lost."

Avalon said, "Scrabble is that game which involves small wooden tiles with letters on them out of which you form words on a board?"

"It has its complications—" began Rubin.

Pentili overrode him. "You have stated the essentials, Mr. Avalon. I mention the game because it has something to do with the problem. Stepan never achieved his aim fully. He retained his Russian accent, and his vocabulary was never as broad as he would have liked it to be; but we encouraged him because we felt it to be a sign of increasing dedication to our side. The Soviets probably supported it because they felt it would make him a more efficient spy for them."

"They may have been right," said Rubin dryly.

"*They* killed him, remember," said Pentili. "In September 1960 Stepan arrived from Cuba. We had only the most indirect notion of his activities in that country, but his initial guarded contact with us gave us every reason to think he had information of the most vital importance. It remained only for us to get that information in such a way as not to blow his cover.

"In very indirect fashion we arranged to make contact with him in a hotel room. The trouble was that, although neither he nor we knew it at the time, his cover was already blown. Someone got to him before we did and when our man finally arrived, Stepan was dead—knifed. What he meant to tell us, we never learned."

Avalon ran his fingers thoughtfully around the rim of his empty coffee cup.

"Are you certain, sir, that he was killed by the Soviets? We live in a violent society and people are killed every day for a variety of reasons."

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Pentili sighed. "To have an agent killed just at the point of delivering a vital message, and to have that killing come about through some unrelated cause is asking too much of coincidence. Besides, the Washington police were bound to treat it as an ordinary killing, and we helped them since the man was a Soviet national. Nothing was turned up—no theft, no plausible motive arising out of his private life.

"Secondly, there was some interest in the murder on the part of the Soviet embassy, but not enough. They were just a shade too easily satisfied. Thirdly, certain avenues of information, which would have remained open had Stepan died for reasons unconnected with his work, were closed. No, Mr. Avalon, there was no doubt in my mind that he died the death of an agent."

Gonzalo, suddenly aware of crumbs defacing the fine cut of his capel, brushed at himself delicately, and said, "Where's the puzzle, though, Mr. Pentili? You mean who killed him? Now? After sixteen years?"

"No, it doesn't matter who killed him. Even after he was knifed, though, Stepan must have tried to get across *something*, perhaps enough to give us the essential core of what we needed; but if so, he failed. I have been wondering frequently, and painfully, in the years since my retirement whether a greater shrewdness on our part might not have saved our country some of its losses in the years after Stepan's murder."

Halsted said, "I'm sorry if this question is embarrassing, Mr. Pentili, but was your retirement forced on you because of Stepan's death?"

"You mean that I might have been fired as punishment for not having kept him alive? No. The episode did not reflect any discredit on me and I retired only five years ago with a generous pension, the expressed esteem of my confrères, and an award of some sort handed me by President Nixon. —In fact, danger came to me not through Stepan's death but through my insistence that he was trying to tell us something significant. The department dismissed the matter—erroneously, in my opinion; and I was more or less compelled to dismiss it too."

Gonzalo said, "What was Stepan's usual way of giving you information?"

Pentili said, "We are quite certain that Stepan had no documents on him, no letters, no written message. He didn't work that way. He had what any traveler might be expected to have in a

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hotel room. He had clothes, toiletries, and so on, in a single suitcase, and an extra suit in a garment bag. There were signs of a search, but it was a skillful one that left a minimum of disarray. Something may have been taken away, of course, but if so, we could not tell what it was, and it had nothing to do with the problem.

"The only items that might not have been considered perfectly routine were a crossword-puzzle book, with approximately half of the puzzles worked out completely or nearly completely in Stepan's own handwriting, the Scrabble set he always carried with him—"

Rubin interrupted. "So he could strike up games with occasional strangers?"

Pentili said, "No. He had the habit of playing four-handed games with himself when he had nothing to do and using a pocket dictionary to help. He said there was nothing better for developing a vocabulary. The dictionary was there, in his jacket pocket with the jacket hanging in the closet.

"He was knifed while standing, apparently, and that was the one flaw in an otherwise flawless performance, for he was not killed instantly. The killer or killers had to leave rapidly and they left a spark of life behind. Stepan had collapsed just next to the desk and, when they were gone, he managed to pull himself upright. On the desk was the newspaper and a Scrabble set.

"He had opened the top desk drawer and pawed about for the pen. He found it and tried to write with it but it was dry—a common situation in hotel rooms—so he dropped it to the floor. His own pen was in his inner jacket pocket at the other end of the room, and he knew he couldn't make it there. He had only a couple of minutes to live, so he had to use whatever objects were on the desk.

"The newspaper, at the time of the knifing, was folded as it had been when he had bought it earlier, but he—"

Halsted said, "How did you find out all this?"

"Circumstantial. I assure you we are expert at this. The desk drawer was open, the pen, quite dry, was on the floor. Most of all, Stepan was bleeding, partly from his right hand which he had instinctively used to try to ward off the knife, and his own blood marked his every movement and everything he had touched.

"As I say, he unfolded the newspaper to the sports page. He then lifted the top of the box of the Scrabble set, removed the

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board, and managed to take out five letters which he put in the wooden holder used for the purpose. Then he died. The letters were E, P, O, C, and K."

"In that order?" asked Drake.

"In that order, left to right."

"Epock is a period of time in history, isn't it?" said Gonzalo hesitantly.

"It's a point in time," said Rubin, "marked by some significant historical event and later used as a reference, but it's spelled e, p, o, c, h. It ends with an h."

"Making a mistake in spelling under the conditions isn't too surprising," said Gonzalo. "The man was dying and maybe he could hardly see. Perhaps the K looked like an H to him. Besides, he was a Russian and he might not have known how to spell the word."

Pentili said, with a trace of impatience, "That is not really the point. Epock or epoch, k or h, what does it mean?"

Avalon said, "Actually, Tom is our code expert—"

Trumbull shrugged. "Larry has come to *you* men. You work at it. If anything occurs to me, I'll interrupt."

Avalon said, "Would you have a code book, Mr. Pentili, in which EPOCK stands for some phrase or sentence?"

"I assure you that neither EPOCK nor EPOCH means anything in any code of which Stepan had knowledge. No, the answer had to be in the sports page, and if the letters had any meaning it was in connection with the sports page."

"Why do you say that?" asked Halsted.

"Let me explain further," said Pentili—then interrupted himself to say, "I *will* have a little more brandy, Henry, if you don't mind. You're listening to all this, I hope."

"Yes, sir," said Henry.

"Good!" said Pentili. "Now, in the ordinary course of events Stepan might have, in an emergency, transmitted information more densely—that is, with the greatest information per symbol—by simply transmitting a number. Each number would represent a certain phrase. That's an inflexible message, of course, since the proper phrase might not exist; but a number might give a fair approximation, and in the extremity of approaching death he could do no more. He opened the paper to a page on which there were numbers and where one of those numbers might be significant."

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Halsted said, "He might merely have wanted a sheet of paper to write on."

"He had nothing to write with," said Pentili.

"His blood."

Pentili twisted his mouth distastefully. "He might have done that but he didn't. He might not even have been aware he was bleeding. And if he wanted to do that, why *open* the paper? The front page would have been enough."

"He might have opened it at random," said Halsted stubbornly.

"Why? He was a professional. He had lived with death for years and he knew that the information he carried was more important than his life. What he did would have to pass on that information."

Trumbull said, "Come on, Roger, you're being trivial."

Pentili said, "It's all right, Tom. As a matter of fact, the general opinion in the department was that there was no puzzle, that Stepan's attempt at the point of death meant nothing, that whatever he tried to do had failed. I was the only one who wanted to follow it up and I must admit I never succeeded in translating Stepan's dying message.

"The trouble was, you see, that he had opened to the sports page. About the only other page in the paper that could have been more littered with numbers was the financial page. How can we look at all the numbers on the sports page and select the one number that was significant?"

Avalon said, "If we assume that Stepan knew what he was doing, then despite all the numbers, the particular significant number must have been obvious, or should have been. For instance, all the numbers *on* the page may have had no meaning at all. It may have been the number *of* the page itself that really counted."

"First thought I had. However, it was page 32, and 32 stood for 'Cancel previous message.' There was no previous message, so that could not have been it."

Avalon said, "What was on the sports page?"

"I can't reproduce it from memory, of course, and I don't have a Xerox to show you. It dealt with baseball almost entirely, for the season was in its last few weeks. The page had team standings, the box scores of particular games, some pitching and batting statistics."

"And was Stepan knowledgeable about baseball?"

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"To a limited extent," said Pentili. "He was professionally interested in America, reading American history avidly, for instance, so he would have been interested in the national game. You remember World War II movies with their cliché that any Nazi spy, no matter how cleverly schooled, would always give himself away by his ignorance of last year's World Series. Stepan intended not to be caught in this fashion, but he could scarcely have made himself an expert."

"Well," said Avalon, "if ignorance of baseball is the hallmark of the Nazi spy, I had better turn myself in. I know nothing of the game."

"Nor I," said Drake, shrugging.

Gonzalo said, "Come on, nobody can read the papers, watch television, or talk to people without knowing *something* about the game. You guys are just indulging in snobbery. Why don't we figure this out? What kind of number ought it to be? How many digits?"

Pentili said, "At least two digits, possibly three. No more than three."

"All right. If Stepan was no baseball expert, he would have to pick something simple and obvious. Batting averages are in three digits. Maybe there was some batting average that made the headlines."

Pentili shook his head. "There were no numbers in the headlines. We would have been on to that like a shot. I assure you that nowhere on the page, *nowhere,* was there any one number that stood out from the rest. No, gentlemen, I am quite convinced that the sports page by itself was insufficient, that Stepan in his last moments used it only because there was nothing else he could use. The number was there, right there, but there was no way of picking it out without a hint—so he left one."

Rubin said, "You mean the Scrabble letters? EPOCK?"

"Yes."

"I don't see what kind of hint that might be."

Gonzalo said, "He might not have finished, you know. Perhaps he managed to get five letters out and then died. Maybe he gave up on the sports page and was trying to spell out the number, only he didn't finish. If he wanted to write 'one hundred twenty-two,' for instance, that would take a lot more than five letters."

Rubin said, "Are you telling us there's a number that begins with EPOCK?"

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Gonzalo said, "The letters don't have to be in the correct order. In Scrabble you're always arranging and rearranging your letters—like in anagrams. After he had all the letters he wanted, he'd have rearranged them into the number he was spelling. But he died too soon."

Halsted said, "Sorry, Mario, that's not possible. The written forms of the numbers have an odd distribution of letters. For instance"—his mathematician's eyes gleamed—"do you know that you can write all the numbers from zero through nine hundred ninety-nine without using the letter 'a'?"

"So?" said Gonzalo. "There's no 'a' in EPOCK."

"No, but there's a P and a C. Write out the numbers in order and you won't come to a P till you reach—uh—one heptillion which has twenty-four digits. And you won't reach a C till one octillion which has twenty-seven digits. Of course that's in the American system of numeration. In the British system—"

"You've made your point," said Trumbull.

Rubin said, "He could still have been incomplete. He may have given up on the sports page altogether, started fresh, and intended to take out those five letters plus, say, a T, rearranging the whole to spell POCKET. There may have been something in his pocket that carried the message—"

"There wasn't," interposed Pentili curtly.

"It may have been removed after the knifing and he was too far gone to realize it."

"That's a second-order conjecture. You assume an additional T and then a pocket-picking as well to account for it. Most unlikely!"

"Might POCKET have been a code word?" said Rubin.

"No." Pentili waved his hand left and right, palm outward, in a gesture of impatience. "Gentlemen, it is amusing to listen to your conjectures but you are moving in the wrong direction. Habit has a firm hold even at the moment of death. Stepan was a neat person and when death came he had his hand on top of the Scrabble box and was clearly making an effort to replace it. There is no question in my mind that he had taken out all the wooden tiles he needed. We have those five letters, no more."

Halsted asked, "He would not have had time to rearrange the letters?"

Pentili sighed. "There are exactly 120 different ways in which five different letters can be arranged. Not one of the rearrange-

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ments is an English word, any more than 'blain' is." He smiled briefly. "One arrangement is KOPEC, which is a small Russian coin usually spelled KOPEK, but that had no significance that any of us could see. No, EPOCK must refer to a number."

Avalon said suddenly, "Was there anything on the sports page besides sports? I mean, were there some advertisements, for instance?"

Pentili looked into the middle distance as though he were concentrating on an invisible sheet of paper. He said, thoughtfully, "No advertisements. There was, however, a bridge column."

"Ah, could the letters have referred to that? See here, Mr. Pentili, I am not a bridge buff in the real sense, but I play the game and sometimes read a bridge column. They invariably have a hand shown under the headings, NORTH, EAST, SOUTH, and WEST. Each hand has its cards listed acording to suit, SPADES, HEARTS, DIAMONDS, CLUBS and under each suit the cards are listed in descending order of value."

"Well?" said Pentili stonily.

"So consider EPOCK. The E may stand for EAST, the C for CLUBS. East's hand may have five clubs which may, as an example, be K, J, 8, 4, 2. The King and Jack are excluded because they are represented by letters, not digits. That leaves 842 as your code."

Pentili looked at him with some surprise. He said, "I must admit I've never thought of that. When I am back in my office I will look at the bridge hand. Amazing, Mr. Avalon! I would not have thought a new notion could have been advanced at this late stage of the game."

Avalon said, flushing a little, "I can but do my poor best, sir."

"However," said Pentili, "I don't believe your suggestion can be useful. Poor Stepan was not, to my knowledge, a bridge player and it seems to me only a fanatic on the subject would have tried to use bridge for a code like that at the point of death. No, it has to be something simple. He would have seen the sports page as a whole."

Gonzalo said, "Perhaps Henry has a suggestion."

"Ah," said Pentili, "so it comes to Henry in the end. What does all this mean, Henry?"

Henry, who had remained silent at the sideboard throughout the discussion, said, "I cannot say, sir, unless the number 20 would be of signifi—"

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He was interrupted by a suddenly frowning Pentili. "Twenty! Is that just a guess, Henry?"

"Not entirely, sir. Is it significant, then?"

"Significant? I've spent sixteen years gloomily suspecting he was trying to tell us 20. I haven't mentioned 20 in the course of the story, have I?"

There was a chorused negative.

"If I could have shown," said Pentili, "that Stepan was trying to tell us 20, the code number for 'Government in firm control,' I might have been able to stop the Bay of Pigs fiasco—at least, I would have tried. God, I would have tried! —But I don't see how you get 20 out of this, Henry."

"Why, sir, if it is true that Stepan was only moderately knowledgeable in baseball, then he would see on the sports page only what other moderately knowledgeable people would see—like myself, for instance. As Mr. Gonzalo would say, I speak from ignorance when I say that all I see on the sports page is the result of the games—the *score*—and that brings the number 20 rather forcibly to mind."

Avalon, possibly smarting at the failure of his own suggestion, said, "I don't think much of that, Henry, 'Score' is rather an archaic word. Would Stepan have known it?"

"I imagine he would, Mr. Avalon," said Henry. "Mr. Pentili has said that Stepan was an avid reader of American history and one of the best known historical phrases is 'Four score and seven years ago . . . ' "

Pentili looked disappointed. "It's a clever notion, Henry, but not convincing. Too bad."

"It becomes convincing, sir, when you realize that the hint he left—the Scrabble letters—*also signify 20.*"

"In what way?"

"When Mr. Gonzalo asked his question about 'blain,' he specifically asked if it were an *English* word? No one has specified that EPOCK must be English."

Gonzalo said delightedly, "You mean it's Russian for 20?"

Pentili said, "No, it is not Russian for 20. I've already mentioned the KOPEC-KOPEK possibility, but that has nothing to do with 20."

"I'm not thinking of a Russian word," said Henry. "As you have said, habits are hard to break even at the point of death, and Stepan must have found himself using the Russian letters—"

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"The Cyrillic alphabet," said Rubin.

"Yes, Mr. Rubin. Now I have seen the USSR written in Russian letters that look like our CCCP. I suspect therefore that the Russian C is equivalent to our S and the Russian P is equivalent to our R."

"Quite so," said Pentili, looking dumfounded.

"And the Russian K is equivalent to our hard C, so that in *our* letters, EPOCK becomes EROSC, and that can be arranged to read SCORE."

Pentili seemed overcome by a deep depression. "You win, Henry. —Why couldn't you have told me all this in 1960?"

"Had I but known, sir," said Henry.

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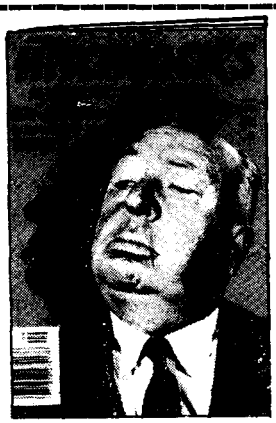

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a *NEW* short story by

MARY AMLAW

Life between Leah and her aunt was a continual, if often silent, conflict. Leah was shy, diffident, resigned to lead a life of quiet desperation, resigned to endure the daily harassments. Aunt was aggressive, hostile, and she always attacked the weaknesses in Leah's defenses. It was a war of nerves, a cold war—until the inevitable day of Armageddon. . .

THE PROMISED LAND

by *MARY AMLAW*

Today, Leah thought as she sat down to breakfast. She would hear from George today.

She pressed her fingers to her forehead to ease the dull ache already beating at her temples. She didn't dare press her fingers to her ears to shut out Aunt's grating voice.

"Make sure you get the birthday cake at Swanson's," Aunt was saying. "I know it's out of the way for you, but they make the best cakes by far. I want it trimmed with pink roses. Instead of putting *Happy Birthday* across the top, have it say *To Leah, my beloved niece, on her 40th birthday.* Have you got that?"

Leah nodded. Forty. Her hand trembled as she picked up her cup of coffee. How many days harsh with Aunt Bella's voice and how many nights spent watching the radium-dial clock tick off the minutes made 40 years?

Aunt's perpetual frown eased slightly. "We'll have a nice little party when you get home. Just the two of us."

Party. That meant Aunt gobbling up most of the cake to a running monologue on how life had ill-used her. The very thought of being a captive audience at the end of a day's work made Leah sag. "I don't feel like a party, Aunt," she said.

Aunt ignored her and poked at her omelette. Back came the frown. It seemed to sharpen all her features to witchlike mean-

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ness. "This omelette is overcooked," she complained. "It's like glue. Really, Leah, I don't know where your head is this morning."

Leah's head was still in the dream Aunt had interrupted by shaking her out of sleep. Florence, her cousin, had been in that dream, and George Cranmore, as he had been in all Leah's dreams this last year.

"I feel a migraine coming on," Leah said.

"Leah, you're not cheating me out of my party!" Aunt said. "You were willing enough to have a party last year when you spent your birthday at Florence's!"

"It was a surprise party," Leah said quietly. "I didn't know about it beforehand."

"I'll never get over your selfishness, Leah," Aunt scolded. "Leaving me alone with a stupid hired nurse for ten whole days! What thanks was that after I've spent my life raising you? What would have happened to you after your mother died without me, I'd like to know?"

Leah clenched her hands. She didn't have the stamina for an argument with Aunt this morning. In spite of herself she heard her own voice, sounding weak and childlike, saying to Aunt, "I had a father. He would have looked after me."

"Your father? Don't speak to me of him." Aunt rose to the fray with relish. Her voice pronounced "father" and "him" with venom. "He was nothing but an idler, a vagabond!"

He had been a singer of sorts, with a little dancing and some magic tricks thrown in on the side. He never made much of a living, but in his presence everything seemed magnified, full of joy and color. Leah used to crowd into the orange-flowered armchair with her mother on Sunday afternoons while her father tried out his act for them. She could not remember her mother, but she remembered the silvery, carefree sound of her laughter and her father's guffaws. They all laughed a lot in those far-gone days.

"That awful man as good as killed your mother," Aunt said.

Leah's hand shook so badly she had to put down her cup. "She died of pneumonia, Aunt. Doctors didn't have the drugs then that they have now."

"She died of poverty!" Aunt pounded the table so hard the silverware jumped. "He hounded her into her grave! She died of the shame of owing bills to everyone, of being too cold and hungry to live!"

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Leah gripped her hands together to stop their shaking. Her whole body seemed to tremble inside, where Aunt couldn't see it and scold her about that too.

"Singing!" Aunt snorted. "No decent man goes around singing while his family is starving under his nose!"

Singing love songs, nursery rhymes, nonsense jingles. Bringing home paper windmills and toy birds made of green and blue feathers. Swinging Leah in the air to shouts of glee. Riding her against a tweedy shoulder that smelled of tobacco and rum.

"He wore her out with his mad ideas," Aunt cried, "and if I hadn't come to take care of you, he'd have worn you out too!"

Aunt had come. Meals began to appear on schedule again. The old furniture was recovered in serviceable brown. Leah's hair was done into braids instead of curls; Aunt never seemed to find time to set Leah's hair, as her mother had done.

"I spent every penny of my poor dead husband's pension on you," Aunt went on. Leah expected any moment to see her foam at the mouth. "You could at least be grateful!"

Aunt had come, and Leah's father had gone. Been forced to go, Florence once confided to Leah. And in the vacuum where Aunt had driven him, he had died. Aunt told her of it in one small sentence: "Your father died a week ago after a long illness."

From that moment a pall had enveloped Leah. Only George had been able to lift it.

George. Why hadn't she heard from him before now? She stared at her plate. The very appearance of the eggs and bacon that Aunt insisted on every morning nauseated her. She pushed her plate away.

"Is coffee all you're having?" Aunt shook her head. "No wonder you're thin as a stick." She took Leah's plate and attacked the food avidly.

"I'm too nervous to eat," Leah said. The pounding at her temples was spreading to the back of her head.

"Nervous!" Aunt snorted. "What nonsense. You're just making excuses to cheat me out of my party."

Not nervous, frightened, Leah thought. I'm 40 years old today, and I'm frightened. "There's nothing to celebrate," she said.

Aunt sniffed. "You didn't think so last year."

Last year there had been George, a wonderful birthday gift. Florence had introduced him at Leah's surprise party. "Our neighbor down the road," Florence had said. Her eyes had spar-

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kled so brightly that Leah knew Florence had invited George purposely, hoping to promote a romance. George was a widower, an ordinary man, tall, graying, thickening around the middle. His warm laugh and kindly face reminded Leah of her father. She had liked him at once.

"You haven't been the same since those ten days at Florence's," Aunt complained. "You've been selfish and moony all year long. I suppose Florence put it into your head to get married and leave me. Well, misery loves company, they say!"

"Florence isn't miserable." Leah caught herself, too late. Why couldn't she hold her tongue? Every word that escaped her only gave Aunt more ammunition. "It's not a bad life, being married to a man you love and raising his children."

"Love!" Aunt fairly screeched. "So *that's* what's in your mind! I hope you don't think any man would marry *you* for love! You're forty years old. Cook and housekeeper and servant, that's all you'd be for a man. Love indeed!"—and Aunt broke into peals of laughter.

What am I for you? Leah wanted to shout. This time she managed to say only, "I'll be late for work." She got up and cleared the table while Aunt laughed until tears ran from her eyes.

"Bring home some lobster for supper," Aunt said as Leah picked up her purse. Her own face flashed at her from the hall mirror—thin and strained-looking. I look sick, Leah noted, surprised. So pale!

She walked down the stairs in air already warm, and stepped into the blinding sun of a July morning. She checked the mailbox—a circular, the telephone bill, a reminder about the church's annual potluck supper.

No letter from George. Not even a birthday card from Florence.

The block to the bus stop seemed endless over the steaming pavement. The sun's glare made her head throb.

Last year the sun had meant pleasure. Sailing. Swimming. George's eyes lighting with pleasure every time he looked at her. Canoeing on a still lake in the early morning. Lying on the warm sand as the sun went down. Picnicking under towering conifers by a tumbling brook. The pall that had shrouded Leah since her father's death seemed to disintegrate, melted by the sun and the joy of being with George. In its place she found a door opening on a new world, a world remembered from the time before Aunt Bella came.

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Dancing with George. "I'm not very good at it," she had confessed as he held out his arms to her. She had been to just one dance in her life, her Senior Prom, with a date dragooned for the occasion through the Reverend Greavy.

"Don't worry about it." George smiled.

Leah had come home from her Senior Prom without even the shyest of good-night kisses. Aunt had been pleased.

She would not have been pleased to know how the dance with George ended, both of them close as they wandered outside into the dark while all the night smells of the summer earth rose around them.

Leah cut her hair short enough to curl and had it lightened. She went on a shopping spree with Florence and bought clothes in sunny colors that lifted her spirits.

"There!" Florence crowed, as Leah modeled her new clothes. "That's the Leah I remember!—not this drab stolid thing in gray dresses three sizes too big for her. Leah, you're transformed!"

On the last of her ten days of freedom, George told her he had to go to California on business. "I may be gone several months," he said. "When I get back, will you want to see me?"

Leah returned to Aunt Bella in such high spirits that even Aunt's perpetual discontent couldn't cloud her happiness. George loves me, Leah sang to herself. George loves me, and he will come for me as soon as he can.

The first Saturday of her return home, George sent flowers. Aunt eyed them suspiciously. "Who'd send a useless thing like that?" she snapped as Leah arranged them lovingly.

"Just a friend."

"One of Florence's no-good friends," Aunt sniffed. She circled the vase of flowers like a dog returning again and again to a place that held the scent of danger. "That bold, brazen hussy! She unsettles you. Imagine sending you home with your hair dyed yellow! And that red thing you're wearing isn't fit for a decent woman."

The week after, George sent candy and a card. "Sweets to the sweet. One sweet a day, my sweet, and I'll be home the day it's gone."

"Candy!" Aunt Bella's voice bristled. Her sharp little eyes studied Leah closely. "It's from a man. Isn't it? From a man! Have you no shame?" Aunt tried to take the box out of Leah's hands. "I thought I'd taught you how to treat candy from a man!"

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Every time she said "man" her voice cracked. She was dancing with rage.

Leah had seen her do just such a mad dance one winter afternoon when she was 14. She had been rehearsing Handel's *Messiah* with the junior choir for Christmas. The rehearsal had gone on well into the evening. Daniel Harvey, a lanky redheaded choir-mate, rode her home on the handlebars of his bike. Stars littered the sky; the November wind felt sweet to her face. The bike seemed to climb like Pegasus, rising on invisible wings from the earth to a longed-for world of dreams. On parting, Daniel had thrust a cluster of Hershey's kisses into her hand. Leah ran into the house in triumph, her face flushed with pleasure.

Aunt had been watching through the window. She snatched the kisses out of Leah's hand. "You are never to let a boy cheapen you like that again!" Aunt scolded. "Riding on the handlebars, being made a show of for everyone to laugh at! What can the Reverend Greavy be thinking of to allow it!" And Aunt threw the candy kisses into the ashcan.

But she wouldn't get George's candy even if she hopped about like Rumpelstiltskin. Leah brought the box of candy to work and kept it in her desk. Each day she ate one piece, longing for the day the box would be finished; but when that day came, George still hadn't returned.

Leah began watching the mail. Nothing. Each evening she asked Aunt if anyone had phoned during the day. No one had phoned. As winter came and went, Leah wrote and tore up a hundred letters. Twice she tried to phone him. Both times she turned aside, unable to finish dialing. It wasn't in her to be so forward. She let her hair fade to its former lusterless no-color. Her headaches intensified, and Aunt's voice seemed to whine on a more penetrating note.

If George didn't get in touch with her today—Leah couldn't finish the thought. Each time the phone on her desk rang, the sound reverberated in her head like a fire alarm. By four o'clock her head was one great throbbing pain. She was gathering her things to go home when Florence phoned.

"Had to wish you happy birthday, sweetie. How did you like my card?"

"Card?" Florence's voice fell like balm on Leah's ears.

"I guess it's still in the mail. I sent it from Montreal. Tom and I just got home this minute. Leah, what a marvelous city! You'd

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love it." How happy Florence sounded! "Sweetie, would you like to come for a visit? It was such fun having you last summer."

Would she! A chance to see George again without seeming too pushy. A break from Aunt Bella. "I'd love to, Florence, but I don't see how I can leave Aunt so soon. She's still angry that I visited you last summer."

"Then I'll run up tomorrow. We can go out for dinner and hatch some plans. By the way, I ran into an old flame of yours in Montreal. George Cranmore."

George! Leah gripped the phone so hard her fingers hurt. "How is he?" she asked.

"Fine. Just got married again." Florence's tone changed from exuberance to concern. "Sweetie, what happened? I thought you liked him."

"I did," Leah choked.

"Then why did you write him you weren't interested?"

Leah was too stunned to answer.

"Really, sweetie, nice widowers like George don't turn up every day," Florence chided. "There he was, all alone in California just dying to hear from you, and zingo!—you let him have it right between the eyes."

"I didn't write," Leah said. She felt as if she was smothering. "There's some mistake. He'd promised to send me an address so I could reach him while he was out west, but it never came."

There was silence at Florence's end of the line.

"I didn't have the courage to phone him," Leah said. "I didn't want to hear him say it had only been a summer romance."

Her head was splitting. George married! Lost to her by some stupid error! She could hardly breathe.

Florence said, "The dragon."

"What?"

"Aunt Bella. She did it."

"Oh, Florence, surely not." But the sly look in Aunt's eyes when the flowers had come haunted Leah. And her outrage over the candy.

"George tried a dozen times to reach you," Florence said. "His letters came back unopened. When he phoned he was told he had the wrong number."

Aunt wouldn't tamper with Leah's mail! No, no. Aunt rarely left the apartment. And yet she was always up and dressed before Leah awoke. Why couldn't she have censored the contents of the

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mailbox while Leah was still sleeping?

Leah checked out sick. Surely Aunt wouldn't do such a thing, Leah told herself as she ordered the cake with the pink frosting reading: *To my dear niece Leah.* Aunt wasn't sneaky, Leah thought as she stopped at the fish market for shrimp. Her head hadn't ached so badly since Florence's wedding when she had a second drink. She felt so weak she took a taxi home.

Up into the gloom and heat of the stairwell, her thighs trembling with fatigue. Her fingers worried the string on the cake box.

Aunt pounced on Leah's purchases. "You're home early," she said as she lifted out the cake.

"I'm sick," Leah said.

Aunt frowned at the cake. "Leah, this isn't what I wanted! It says *To my dear niece Leah* and I wanted *To Leah, my beloved niece, on her 40th birthday.*"

Leah sighed. "I don't feel well enough to take it back."

"Oh, well, it will have to do," Aunt grumbled. "But it's not what I wanted!" She snatched at the fish. "What's this? Shrimp? I asked for lobster! Shrimp is nothing but an appetizer."

"Take all of it," Leah said. "I don't want anything except to lie down."

"There you go, trying to do me out of my little party again!" Aunt protested. "I've been looking forward to it all day. Go freshen up. We'll celebrate now. You can sleep afterward."

Leah shut herself in the bathroom and splashed cold water on her face. The blank staring look of her eyes unnerved her. She could hear Florence's voice saying endlessly, George married, George married. It rang in her head like an insane recording.

Aunt, answering the phone. Wrong number. No. Surely not. Surely not.

Leah thrust her whole head under the faucet. Water dripped down her neck and onto her dress.

"Leah, bring me my gold chain," Aunt called from the kitchen. "This is enough of an occasion for me to wear it."

The shock of the cold water on Leah's head stopped Florence's voice. If only her hands would stop twitching!

She let herself into Aunt's room. She seldom came in here. Everything was massive and foreboding from the pineapple-carved fourposter to the strongbox that held Aunt's treasures. Feeling like an intruder, Leah picked up the chain, a heavy strand of gold that had once belonged to Leah's mother. Leah held it to her own

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throat, wanting to wear it herself, but it wasn't worth the fuss that Aunt would raise.

And I am in chains enough. The thought came before Leah could stop it. Her hands shook so hard she dropped the chain and had to scrabble after it.

That's how she noticed the torn greeting card in Aunt's basket. She knelt and fished out the pieces. There were four of them. When she put them together, they showed an extremely ugly woman under the legend: Happy Fortieth! Inside it said: *It's our inner beauty that counts.* Florence's signature rose across the back in a bold scrawl.

Leah shook all over.

Aunt Bella. Aunt Bella reading George's letter to find his California address. Aunt Bella writing as if she were Leah, brushing George off. Aunt Bella returning his subsequent letters unopened.

Leah got to her feet. Her body seemed to have no substance. She seemed to float out to the dining room.

Aunt had set the table with her good china. She was already seated, the cake before her with four candles waiting for the match.

Leah placed the pieces of Florence's card before her. "Why didn't you give this to me?" she asked. Her voice seemed to be rising from some faraway well inside herself.

"Because Florence isn't good for you," Aunt snapped. "She takes after your father's family. Ever since you were children she's had a way of unsettling you. Really, Leah, when I think how you returned from your visit to her, with your painted hair and garish outfits—!" Aunt heaped shrimp on her plate and began to eat. "Florence always tried to take you away from me. Just seeing her card has upset you; you've gone and wet all your hair."

"You had no right to take my mail."

"I had every right," Aunt said. "Florence makes you turn against me."

"Florence makes me think of myself," Leah answered. "She makes me aware of my true feelings." She could hear her voice rising. "And what of George, Aunt Bella? What right did you have to keep his letters from me?"

For a moment Leah hoped Aunt would deny it. But she only raised her eyebrows and looked at Leah as if she had said something vulgar.

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"Was it George who raised you?" Aunt asked. "Would George have taken care of me in my old age? Would you have taken me to live with you? I think not. You're ungrateful, Leah. You're turning out just like your father." Aunt lighted the candles on the cake. "Blow them out," she ordered, "and I'll sing *Happy Birthday.*"

Out of long habit Leah complied. "I've a good mind to walk out on you right this minute," she said.

"You do that." Aunt helped herself to a large slice of cake. "I'll have the police locate you. I'll get a psychiatrist to examine you and put you away until you come to your senses."

Leah gripped the golden chain. She threaded it around her fingers.

"Why are you playing with my jewelry?" Aunt asked. "Really, Leah, you're doing the strangest things today."

"I feel strange," Leah said.

"It's your age." Aunt's eyes shone with a cruel light. "The best part of your life is gone. Once you're forty it's all downhill."

The door to Leah's dreamland, the promised land she had believed in without knowing what it was she clung to so hard, began to shut in her face. She stood outside with Aunt Bella. Inside was her father, and Daniel Harvey, and George himself, holding out his hand to her.

"Give me my chain." Aunt reached for it and arranged it around her neck. "Come fasten the clasp for me, Leah."

Leah got up trembling. All the barren years under Aunt's thumb endured for nothing! Don't shut me out! she cried inside herself.

Leah's fingers closed on the chain. Somehow she had got her hands crossed.

"You're hurting me!" Aunt cried. "Leah!"

Leah's hands had found the task they had ached for all day. With the chain firmly in her fingers she uncrossed her arms. The chain sawed into Aunt's neck.

"You had no right to break up my romance with George!" Leah cried. "You had no right to drive my father away! You didn't even let me know he was dying!"

She pulled and pulled. The chain was strong.

"You stole my life!" Pulled and pulled. "I want my life, do you hear? I'm taking my life back from you!" she screamed in a kind of glee.

Aunt was very still.

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Presently Leah stopped pulling. She giggled. Her headache had disappeared. A radiant light flowed out to her from the door to her magic world. The door swung wider and wider. Dear familiar faces crowded round to greet her.

"Why, Daddy!" she cried. "You came to my birthday party! And George. George! Oh, how wonderful! We'll be together forever now, won't we? Forever."

They celebrated Leah's birthday so well that not even Florence, who came late and in tears, could dampen their spirits. Florence's voice mourned from farther and farther away. "Leah. Oh, Leah. It's me, sweetie. Florence. Don't you know me?"

But Leah was lost in her promised land, and presently Florence's mourning ceased.

"Q"

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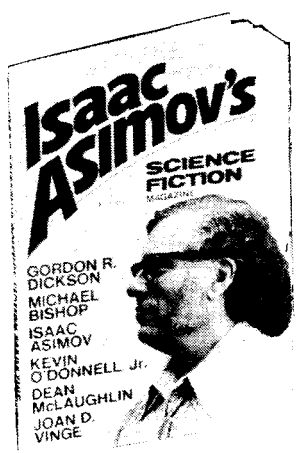

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME DOSSIER

by OTTO PENZLER

POTPOURRI: Nicholas Roeg (who directed *The Man Who Fell to Earth)* has been signed by Francis Ford Coppola to direct the motion picture version of Joe Gores' excellent novel, *Hammett.*

Murder Ink, the first major bookshop in the United States to specialize in mystery fiction, has changed ownership. Carol Brener has taken over the premises at 271 West 87th Street, New York City, serving sherry to visitors, just as Dilys Winn used to do.

Michele B. Slung, the editor of a new mystery line at David McKay, is responsible for the first American publication of *Watson's Choice* ($6.95) by Gladys Mitchell. Curiously overlooked in the past, this is a novel that will be irresistible to fans of two great detectives—Sherlock Holmes and Beatrice Bradley, Miss Mitchell's series character in 50 novels. The (British) Crime Writers' Association bestowed an honorary Silver Dagger on Gladys Mitchell last year for her life's achievement, coinciding with the publication of the 50th Bradley book.

Stanley Ellin has completed his major new novel.

The literary periodical *Antaeus* ($7.95) has devoted its March issue to mystery, western, and science fiction.

Look for John Gardner, creator of Boysie Oakes and one of the finest writers in the mystery world, to become one of the hottest "names" of the year. His book, *The Return of Moriarty* (Putnam, $8.95) is being filmed as *Limelight.* His *A Complete State of Death* is being filmed as *The Stone Killer.* And Doubleday is confident of a huge success with *The Werewolf Trace,* due to be published shortly. David Frost has purchased the film rights of this story about Goebbel's son being found living in the English countryside.

Popular novelist and short-story writer Mignon G. Eberhart has been elected the new president of the Mystery Writers of America.

The new novel by 1976 Edgar-winner Brian Garfield, *Recoil,* is being published in England prior

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to its American release by Morrow. A two-hour CBS movie is based on his *Relentless.* Garfield also hopes to be happier with the screen version of his novel, *The Romanov Succession,* than he was with *Death Wish,* which he actively dislikes.

Strange Horizons (Scribners, $8.95), essays surveying social and psychological aspects of science fiction by the erudite Sam Moskowitz, has a long chapter on crime titled "From Sherlock to Spaceships."

Sweden offers an award called a "Sherlock" for the best suspense novel of the year. The 1974 winner was *The Moment of Truth* by K. Arne Blom, and it has been published in English translation by Harper & Row ($6.95).

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

In London these days you can certainly drink to the masters of mystery. The Sherlock Holmes Pub has long been a favorite haunt, and now off Fleet Street the Edgar Wallace Pub has just opened—not only an Edwardian retreat with gaslights illuminating period interior and exterior but a veritable museum of Wallaceana.

Penelope Wallace, the prolific writer's daughter, has loaned the establishment rare first editions and manuscripts (you can see his deletions and corrections) as well as many personal effects: a gold cigarette case, a walking stick, several items from his years in South Africa, plus over 150 photographs taken during his lifetime. The décor (deep mahogany woodwork) incorporates Wallace's racing colors—cherry, gold, and deep beige.

Mystery lovers on a London tour can also savor its drama. Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* and *Murder at the Vicarage* are both still theatrical blockbusters, and two more of her books, *Death on the Nile* and *Evil Under the Sun,* will soon be turned into big-scale films, scripted by Anthony Shaffer, produced by Britain's EMI Studio, responsible for *Murder on the Orient Express.* And the Old Vic theater recently revived—to rave reviews—Arthur Ridley's 1920s melodrama, *The Ghost Train.* This celebrated mystery play, about passengers stranded overnight at a supposedly haunted rural railway station used by smugglers, has not lacked for European audiences across the years—it is constantly revived in stock and only last fall was filmed in Denmark—but it is good to see a venerable stage thriller given a major, and affectionate, London production.

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INTERVIEW: JULIAN SYMONS

In addition to being one of the most popular and talented authors of mystery novels and short stories in the world, Julian Symons is a noted critic and historian of the genre. His perceptive views of detective fiction formed the basis of *Mortal Consequences,* one of the best surveys of detective fiction ever written.

EQMM: During the past five years or so, there have been innumerable books published in which Sherlock Holmes is featured. Your own novel, *A Three-Pipe Problem,* although one of the most literate and well-plotted, didn't do as well as one might have hoped. Do you know why? And are you a Sherlockian?

SYMONS: Because of my admiration for Holmes and my fascination with the Holmes myth, I had intended to write something about him for years. When *A Three-Pipe Problem* was released, it came on the heels of Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution,* which didn't help its sales at all. I do not approve of such groups as the Sherlock Holmes Society (London) and the Baker Street Irregulars (New York). They admire Holmes in a way which is no credit to him or to them—they make him a joke. All those articles about whether Holmes attended Oxford or Cambridge, or both, and all the elaborate playacting that accompanies it, does no service to Arthur Conan Doyle who, after all, wrote the stories. If you admire Holmes, you presumably admire Conan Doyle.

EQMM: Holmes is the most famous of all series detectives, of course. You do not use a series character at all now, do you?

SYMONS: If you want to write a serious book, a series character hampers you to the point where it becomes impossible. Although I've written some books with series characters, they were done when I was much younger, and I wouldn't do them today.

EQMM: Since you don't use a series character, do you employ any device, or theme, as a kind of trademark in your books?

SYMONS: Not a trademark, but one theme that runs through pretty much all of my serious crime stories is the idea of people wearing masks, that we all of us wear masks, that we always wear one sort or another, that we are all doing a kind of playacting. When people have tipped over into criminal activity, what they are really doing is taking off their masks.

EQMM: Which of your own books do you like best? Least?

SYMONS: I think three or four of my books are very good, and quite a few are really bad. *The 31st of February* was the first book of mine which I thought was good. *The Progress of a Crime* is good. *The Immaterial Murder Case* is dreadful.

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EQMM: What is the next book?

SYMONS: A book about Edgar Allan Poe which started out as a biography but which has become a biography plus a critical work—in two sections. There have been a great many biographies of Poe, but this will be different because it will be an attempt to see Poe as his contemporaries saw him—a journalist, of course—like themselves, struggling to earn a living. Whatever may have been Poe's unconscious desire, his chief conscious desire was to establish a critical journal. This is something he tried to do his entire adult literary life and never succeeded in doing.

* * *

EDITOR'S NOTE: A new collection of stories by Julian Symons, *How To Trap a Crook,* will be available at newsstands in February.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Gideon's Drive (Harper and Row, $7.95) by "J. J. Marric" is the final novel in John Creasey's finest series. In this one, Scotland Yard C.I.D. Commander George Gideon and his colleagues encounter an escaped rapist, a ring of food hijackers, a ptomaine scare, and other problems, including Mrs. Gideon's mid-life crisis. The key to Creasey's appeal is not his style, nor his plotting (serviceable at best), but his characters—both the major ones and the minor ones in this series.

Gideon's cases are often not so much detective stories as studies of how a very capable and sensitive administrator in a large organization does his job. Here that organization is Scotland Yard, but it might as well be a university, a department store, or an oil company. (***)

**** Anders Bodelsen: *Consider the Verdict,* Harper and Row, $8.95. Translated from the Danish by Nadia Christensen. The story of small-town cab driver Martin Bendix, unexpectedly accused of a rape-murder, offers an instructive look at the Danish legal system and one of the subtlest and most disturbing conclusions in recent memory. Another distinguished Scandanavian crime novel by the author of the equally impressive *Straus.*

*** Mignon G. Eberhart: *Family Fortune,* Random House, $7.95. The 1977 President of Mystery Writers of America, a prominent practitioner since the twenties, presents a gripping Civil War romance in the best brother-against-brother tradition. More research and a better feel for period than many historical gothics have to offer.

*** Richard Lockridge: *A Streak of Light,* Lippincott, $7.95. Nathan Shapiro investigates the murder of a right-wing columnist for a

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New York daily. The political lines are unsubtly drawn, but the newspaper background is vividly exploited. An interesting murderer and motive.

*** Sara Woods: *My Life Is Done,* St. Martin's, $7.95. Moody barrister Antony Maitland, one of the more interesting series sleuths of the day, tries to discover the blackmailer of an ecology-minded Member of Parliament, and murder, naturally, follows. A leisurely closed-circle whodunit, done with the author's customary grace and class.

*** Gregory McDonald: *Confess, Fletch,* Avon, $1.75. An Edgar-winning first novelist presents a neat mystery of murder and art theft in his second book. Inspector Flynn, narrator Fletcher's nemesis, is a truly original character, unlike any fictional policeman I can recall. But somebody got at the story with a bicycle pump full of irrelevant dialogue —shorter would have been better.

*** Bill Pronzini: *Games,* Putnam, $7.95. A Senator and his girl friend are terrorized on a private island by an apparent group of devil-worshippers in this well-written and genuinely suspenseful pursuit novel. Not the best Pronzini, but readable and expertly constructed as always.

*** Amanda Mackay: *Death Is Academic,* McKay-Washburn, $7.95. Another in the long line of creditable first mysteries with academic settings—this time Duke University with political science professor Hannah Land as amateur sleuth. The police are likeable, the suspects well differentiated, and the solution fairly clued, though a bit simple to baffle everybody for the requisite time.

*** Jacques Futrelle: *Great Cases of the Thinking Machine,* Dover, $3.00. Thirteen previously uncollected stories about the greatest American series detective of the years before World War I. They aren't all gems to be sure, but Futrelle's gusto, ingenuity, and sheer audacity make even the raggeder ones fun.

** Rae Foley: *Put Out the Light,* Dodd Mead, $6.95. The latest from a competent, perhaps undervalued old pro who combines gothic trappings with intriguing whodunit plots. Not at her very best here, but still readable and entertaining.

** Dorothy Daniels: *Juniper Hill,* Pocket Books, $1.50. Except for a *genuine* piano-playing ghost, this San Francisco-based gothic is so much like a mystery of the teens or early twenties that I expected Fleming Stone to be called in to wrap things up in the last two chapters. Lots of fun as pure nostalgia and an astonishingly good book considering the author's staggering productivity.

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REVIEWS OF NEW BOOKS

THE WOLF IN THE CLOUDS, by Ron Faust. Bobbs-Merrill Co., $8.95.

Two U.S. Forest Rangers have been assigned to find three hippies, lost on the mountain known as The Wolf in the Clouds. Subzero weather and new snows bring the threat of avalanches. Complicating their search is the presence, somewhere on the mountain, of a dangerous killer. When the Rangers finally locate the kids in an abandoned cabin, it is only to be pinned down by the killer's murderous fire from without and the psychopathic—and just as murderous—fear of one of the hippies in the cabin. Only two of these ill-fated six will survive.

Faust's last novel, *Tombs of Blue Ice*, was rated "better than *The Eiger Sanction.*" (Chicago *Daily News*)

HOW TO TRAP A CROOK, and 12 Other Mysteries, by Julian Symons. Davis Publications, $1.35.

Julian Symons has impressive credentials as a writer-and-critic in the mystery field. He is a first-class crime novelist and short-story writer and this new collection of his fiction contributes grandly to the "distinctive literary form" he loves, the crime fiction for which his critical *Mortal Consequences* won a Mystery Writers of America's award.

All of the 4 novelets and 9 short stories in this highly readable collection first appeared in *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.*

PUT OUT THE LIGHT, by Rae Foley. Dodd, Mead, $6.95.

When Constance Armstrong accepts her rich Aunt Natalie's invitation to stay with her, she finds herself inolved in terrible danger. Natalie had not been in communication with her sister's family for years; now she seemed to be making amends for the past. But why do Natalie's lawyer and maid want Constance to leave? Was there something curious about Natalie's new husband and the source of his income? Was it possible that both Natalie and Constance might be in danger?

Rae Foley's newest novel of romantic suspense is "a rich mixture of murder, motive and suspects [that] makes for a suspenseful entertainment."—ALA BOOKLIST

BULLETS FOR MACBETH, by Marvin Kaye. Saturday Review Press/ Dutton, $8.95.

Folger Shakespeare Library recently added this *tour de force* to its archives, for scholars are acclaiming it the genuine solution to the 350-year-old mystery of *Macbeth*'s Third Murderer. Hilary Quayle (*Grand Ole Opry Murders*) unriddles the literary riddle while tracking down a modern-day killer.

"A spectacular production . . . Kaye's book should appeal to those who relish Josephine Tey's *The Daughter of Time.*"—Richard Suter, *Parkersburg Sentinel*

"The third — and finest — in the Hilary Quayle series. Kaye does a superb job of building mood: the eerie, gloomy atmosphere . . . is remarkably like that of *Macbeth.*" — Steve Knickmeyer, author of *Straight*

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a *NEW* short story by

BARBARA CALLAHAN

The influence of Sigmund Freud on modern literature has been colossal—its immensity cannot be measured. Today hardly a story is written, short or long, that doesn't have somewhere in its innards—in the invisible part of the iceberg, the invisible words between the lines, the words left unwritten—the subtle manifestations of the superego, ego, and libido that Freud discovered, named, and revealed in all human beings. Freud has made us see more clearly what has always been true—that writers create characters in our own image . . .

DON'T CRY, SALLY SHY

by BARBARA CALLAHAN

The puppets have been misbehaving lately. They refuse to speak their lines correctly. They miss cues. They sing their songs too loudly. And I've lost my best accompanist because of them.

I tried to explain to him that it was the puppets' fault, not mine. His face grew redder when I told him that. His words still sting whenever I think of them.

"If the puppets are out of control, Miss Jenkins, it is because you, the puppeteer, are out of control. You have crossed the border into fantasyland, Miss Jenkins. You attribute life and will to puppets which have neither. You had better see a doctor, and quickly."

As if to convince him that the puppets reacted on their own, the puppet Bobby Bold who had been lying limply in my hand suddenly became rigid and parroted his words: "You had better see a doctor, and quickly." As I tried to shush the naughty puppet, Bobby added, "*You* see a doctor quickly, you broken-down pulverizer of piano keys."

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The accompanist's voice trembled as he told me never to call him again for a performance. He rushed toward the exit of the hall without giving me the opportunity to apologize for Bobby's brazenness. He covered his ears as I shouted that I had nothing to do with Bobby's outburst.

Bobby laughed as I shoved him into the suitcase that houses him and his companions—Grandmother Good, Sally Shy, and Fox Trot. I knew that Grandmother Good would soundly scold him after I closed the suitcase. She never tells me what happens inside their home but I can guess. Sally Shy would cry—Bobby's brashness always frightens her. Fox Trot, that sly old pet, would grin when Grandmother chastised Bobby—Fox Trot enjoys Bobby's transgressions. I believe that tricky fox encourages Bobby in his mischief.

The puppets, even Bobby, used to be quite docile, but since the automobile accident they have been maliciously asserting themselves. I know the accident disturbed them. Although they were safely cushioned in their suitcase, they were informed of all the details by Grandmother Good. I had taken Grandmother into the hospital with me when the police officer drove me there for x-rays.

I needed the sweet consolation that Grandmother Good always provided. That's why I insisted on holding her in my hand throughout the ordeal. The hospital personnel thought the puppet's presence was an indication that I had suffered a concussion when my head bumped against the windshield. It was too difficult to explain to them how soothing Grandmother is, so I didn't try.

After the x-rays I fell asleep on the gurney. When I awoke, Grandmother repeated to me the words I thought I had dreamed: "The little boy, Jack, is dead. He was killed instantly by the impact of your car."

The boy's parents visited me at my apartment. In their grief they told me they held nothing against me. They knew their son Jack, only five years old, frequently dashed across the street without looking out for cars. I brought Grandmother Good out of the suitcase and permitted her to tell the parents how I would re-dedicate my talents as a puppeteer to bringing joy to the lives of children. I sent all the fees from my next three performances to the boy's parents.

It was during the fourth performance after the accident that Bobby began interrupting the nursery rhymes that Sally Shy was

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reciting. It was so mean of Bobby to disturb her. My audiences always love it when Sally finally speaks. For most of every performance she hides behind Grandmother's skirt. When she grows weary of the taunts of Bobby and Fox Trot, she triumphs by shaming them with her superb memory and diction. The children cheer when Sally recites. So many of the children must identify with her shyness.

She had begun with the rhyme "Jack, be nimble, Jack, be quick" when Bobby pushed her aside and chanted, "Jack can't be nimble, Jack can't be quick, Jack's a broken candlestick." The children, thinking Bobby's rudeness was part of the act, laughed and laughed. Sally cried onstage because she knew that Jack was the dead boy's name.

Fox Trot saved the day by doing the special dance in which he prances around the stage while whisking away Bobby's ball and Grandmother's mixing spoon with his bushy tail. I can always depend on Fox Trot to improvise when it's necessary.

When those awful telephone calls came in the middle of the night, I slipped Fox Trot on my hand to let him answer. I was sure he'd know how to thwart the caller. He is so shrewd that he had only to listen to four of the calls before he knew who was making them. He determined that those terrible words, "If you had stopped sooner, the boy would still be alive," came from a rival puppeteer who desperately wanted all the engagements I was receiving.

"I'll call the cops on you, Mary Reedy," he shouted. "I know it's you making these calls. It's the kind of lowdown trick a fox like me can spot right away."

Mary Reedy was so startled that she dropped the phone on a table before hanging up. She never called again.

"She's just trying to ruin your nerves, kiddo, so she can get your jobs. But amateurs can't shake up real pros like us, can they, kiddo?" Fox Trot cackled.

"No, they can't shake us up, dear pet," I told him. To prove it, I spent the rest of the evening sewing new outfits for the entire puppet family. Sally loved her dress, Grandmother was pleased with her apron, and Fox Trot strutted happily in his new feathered hat. But Bobby, vicious Bobby Bold, how he loves to torment me! He deliberately ruined the sweatshirt I had so painstakingly made for him. I had lettered the number 3 on it. When I inspected my handiwork the next morning, I saw what he had done. He had

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put the number 5 next to the 3. His shirt read 35. When I saw that number, I collapsed on a chair. The last time I had seen 35 was on the bloodstained sweatshirt worn by Jack, the little boy I had hit.

His cruel prank upset me so much that I could not fulfill the engagement I had at the Hill School. I could only sit sobbing in a chair. Grandmother Good clamored to be let out of the suitcase. She wanted so much to comfort me. I could hear Sally Shy crying and Fox Trot yelling, "Don't let him get you down, kiddo," but I could not move from the chair.

When the doorbell rang, I forced myself to answer it. The detective who had been so kind to me on the day of the accident was standing in the hall. I hated for him to see me looking so forlorn, so I ran into my bedroom and shut the door. I heard him walk into the kitchen. In a few minutes he knocked on my door.

When I didn't open it, he entered the room carrying a cup of tea. "My mother always told me that tea is an excellent remedy for whatever ails a person," he said.

I took the cup from him and we went into the living room. He didn't seem to hear all the noises coming from the suitcase.

"I had some time off this morning," he said, "and I thought I'd like to see you perform. I knew you were going to be at the Hill School, so I went to the auditorium. The children were very disappointed when you didn't come. I thought perhaps you were sick, so I decided to drop by."

"I'm glad you came," I told him after a few sips of tea.

When I had finished it, he handed me my coat.

"Let's go," he said.

The puppets abruptly stopped arguing in the suitcase to listen to him. I heard nothing but my heart beating.

"Go where?" I asked.

"To a restaurant."

"Restaurant?"

"Yes, I know a fine place. You need some lunch."

As I put on my coat, I heard Fox Trot whispering advice. "Charm him, kiddo, charm him. It's good to have a cop for a friend."

I picked up the suitcase and headed for the door.

"Why are you taking that?" the detective asked.

"The puppets are in it. I take them everywhere. They'll be upset if I leave them here."

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He laughed, but didn't attempt to dissuade me. He carried the suitcase to his car.

As we drove to the restaurant, I tried so often to ask him something, but I was too embarrassed. I had to bring out Sally Shy to ask him for me.

"Your name, nice man, is Clark?" she asked.

"No, it's Mark," he said, "Mark Evans. And your name is?"

"Sally Shy," I answered.

Sally cringed when he reached over and lifted her off my hand.

"She's cute," he said, "but I like *you* better, Miss Jenkins."

"You may call me Alice," I told him softly.

I gently tucked Sally into the suitcase. Grandmother Good would take care of her.

It wasn't until dessert that Mark discussed the accident. He said I might be suffering from a delayed reaction to the shock. He told me the best cure would be to keep busy. "Above all," he advised, "don't cancel performances the way you did today."

I nodded in agreement. I was touched by his concern and wanted to tell him that. But I couldn't until we had a glass of wine after lunch. And before I knew it I was telling him all my troubles about the puppets misbehaving.

He didn't laugh as I expected, nor did he become angry with me as the accompanist had. He simply said, "You'll have to be more firm with the puppets. Remember, you're in the driver's seat."

I must have blanched at the expression "driver's seat" because he patted my hand. He asked me to forgive him for his poor choice of words.

We took a long walk after lunch, the first of many walks we took in the course of our dating. It would have been awkward to carry the suitcase with the puppets during the walks, so I just put Grandmother Good into my pocketbook. Whenever I felt nervous, I would slide my hand into Grandmother's arms and she would give me a reassuring squeeze.

Although I am 30, I had never dated anyone more than twice. Somehow I could never feel relaxed in a dating situation. Mark seemed to sense this. He never forced himself on me. He was patient, oh, so patient. For the three weeks we saw each other every day, I had never been happier.

Aside from Grandmother Good, the puppets hated to see me so contented. They performed well but they resented not going out with Mark and me. One night after we had come home from a

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marvelous concert, Mark sat very close to me on the sofa. I was delighted and rested my head on his shoulder.

Suddenly I heard the muffled voice of Bobby Bold coming from the suitcase. He sounded so distressed that I had to release him. Mark seemed annoyed when I jumped up from the sofa to get the vicious puppet. I apologized and told him that Bobby would have to have his say or he would give me no peace.

I asked Bobby what was bothering him. He turned to Mark and yelled, "If you're thinking of marrying sweet little Alice Jenkins, flatfoot, come see me. I could tell you some things about her that would curl your hair."

I heard Grandmother Good gasp and Sally begin to cry and Fox Trot cackle. Bobby had gone so far out of bounds that there was only one thing to do. I slapped him. I slapped him so hard that he flew off my hand. I went to pick him up to hit him again, but Mark restrained me.

"He's a monster," I sobbed, "a vicious monster."

Mark made me tea and sat with me until I fell asleep. When I awoke, I felt cold and numb. I opened the suitcase and saw Bobby sleeping peacefully, not at all affected by what he had said. I reached for Grandmother, but Fox Trot climbed onto my hand.

"Pull yourself together, kiddo. Don't let the little brat get you down. Play your cards right. Be foxy and you'll have that guy eating out of your hand."

"But how?" I asked. "After Bobby's outburst Mark will never want to see me again."

"Fret not. Call him up at the office and tell him how unnerved you've been. Tell him you haven't been able to sleep at night since the accident."

"But I do sleep, Fox Trot."

"Yeah, we know that. You sleep like the dead."

"Don't say 'dead,' you horrible beast."

"Okay, okay, but you do go out like a light."

"Shut up, shut up, I tell you."

"All right, kiddo. But just do what I told you. Call that guy and cry a lot on the phone. He's a pushover for the dependent type. I know. Tell him you need him and he'll be back in a flash. And be sure to cry a lot."

"I can't pretend to cry," I told him.

"Then get Sally Sob to cry for you. It's what she does best."

I gave Fox Trot a big kiss. I knew he liked it. He acts

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hardboiled, but underneath his sly exterior he's as soft as kitten fur.

The next morning, after I had dialed the phone, I put Sally on my hand. I started the conversation but let Sally talk after I detected a coldness in Mark's voice.

Sally was superb. She never cried better.

She was so good that Mark promised to take me for a drive right after work.

I spent the afternoon soaking in a bubble bath, doing my nails, and setting my hair in a long flowing style. The red dress that I had thought too provocative after I'd bought it seemed to be the perfect selection for my afternoon date.

Mark whistled appreciatively when he saw me. He took my yellow coat from the living-room closet, but I didn't think it blended well with my dress, so I went into the bedroom to get my fur jacket. When I returned, Mark handed me the puppets' suitcase.

"Aren't you going to bring your friends?" he asked.

"No, Mark, I don't need them any more."

"Great," he smiled.

We had a beautiful ride, through the River Drive, out into the country, and back toward town for dinner at our favorite restaurant. I slid close to Mark in his car and rested my head on his shoulder. I was so happy and relaxed that I closed my eyes to visualize him pouring the wine out of the little carafe at the restaurant.

I was jolted out of my reverie by the sudden slamming of brakes. I opened my eyes and screamed.

"It's nothing," Mark said. "A cat crossed in front of me."

I quickly looked toward the pavement. I didn't see a cat, but I did see Jack's house. We had stopped at the exact spot where I had hit the little boy. The house was not on the way to the restaurant.

"Why are we here, Mark?" I cried.

"Somebody wants to talk to me," he answered.

"The boy's parents?"

"No," he said, "a young lady."

He reached into his pocket. When he showed me what he held, I started to tremble. He had Sally Shy in his hand. He must have taken her out of the suitcase when I went in the bedroom to get my jacket. He slipped Sally onto my hand. Each time I pulled Sally off, he pushed her back on.

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"She has nothing to tell you," I said.

"I think she does," he said quietly.

"I do, I do," sobbed Sally.

"Don't say anything," I begged her.

But the poor distraught puppet didn't listen to me. She blurted out those terrible words.

"She was drunk," Sally choked. "Drunk. She had been drinking just the way she always does before a performance. When the little boy ran out into the street, she didn't even see him."

Then Sally cried as I had never heard her cry before. Mark leaned over and removed her from my hand.

"Don't cry, Sally Shy," he told me. "I'm sorry I had to do this, but I hate sloppy work. The procedure in an accident such as yours wasn't followed through. You didn't have a blood test at the hospital, so the thought occurred to me that you could have been drunk when you hit that boy. I had to find out."

On the way to the police station I tried to explain to Mark that I had wanted to tell the truth as soon as it happened, but Fox Trot wouldn't let me. The sly fox told me, "Act like you bumped your head on the windshield. They'll have to take x-rays of you at a hospital. When the x-rays are finished, they'll let you lie down and rest. If they don't, carry on, act hysterical. They'll give you a needle to make you sleep and then forget to give you a blood test. Fake them out, kiddo, fake them out."

Mark drove the rest of the way in silence. I needed someone to talk to me. So I listened very hard and soon I heard Grandmother Good calling to me from my apartment. She told me that everything would be all right. Bobby Bold said that I got what I deserved, so I ignored him. As usual Fox Trot voiced what was in my mind.

"That Mark's a sly one," he said. "I'll tell you something, kiddo, not all foxes are puppets."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Photographer story by

JAMES HOLDING

Manuel Andradas, The Photographer, is a professional hit man. He murders for money—though The Photographer is much too fastidious to use the word "murder," or even to think in terms of the word which, if we remember correctly, S. S. Van Dine called the most dramatic (or was it the most powerful?) word in the English language. The Photographer "nullifies"—a gentler, more genteel expression. But how can he nullify an intended victim whose face, name, and address he does not know? And with these difficulties, how can he turn every facet of a complex situation into an advantage or a profit for himself? Rest assured, The Photographer always finds a way. . .

THE PHOTOGRAPHER AND THE UNKNOWN VICTIM

by JAMES HOLDING

As he entered the terminal building of the Santos Dumont Airport in Rio, Manuel Andradas hitched the strap of his camera case to a more comfortable position on his shoulder and glanced at his wrist watch.

It was 1:30 of a breezy, sun-filled autumn afternoon. One thirty. In plenty of time for the arrival of the Concorde flight from Paris. Manuel nodded with satisfaction. For Rodolfo had made it very clear to him yesterday that in this case there would be but one opportunity for him to identify with certainty the stranger he was to nullify—the man whose name, appearance, or whereabouts even Rodolfo hadn't known. Or, if he had known, had refused to reveal.

The brief meeting with Rodolfo yesterday was still vivid in Manuel's memory. It had occurred at the small restaurant called A Cascatinha in the Forest of Tijuca.

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Over his *cafezinho* Manuel had regarded Rodolfo with scarcely hidden distaste. Rodolfo was as ugly as an ape, with prognathous jaw, thick lips, an oily skin, and a pseudo-comradely smile that exposed rotting teeth. Yet because Rodolfo was Manuel's only contact in Rio with The Big Ones, The Corporation, Manuel tried to conceal his contempt for him.

Rodolfo said, "This is a hurry-up job, Photographer. It must be done tomorrow."

"So?" Manuel sipped his coffee. "An emergency?"

"You could call it that."

"Presumably, then, I shall be paid accordingly?"

"Half a million cruzeiros."

"Ah!" The words sent a thrill through Manuel. If he loved anything in this world more than photography, it was money. "Tell me," he said. "Who is it?"

"We don't know," said Rodolfo.

Manuel paused with his coffee cup in midair. "You don't know?"

"We don't know," repeated Rodolfo. "Only that it is a man. But his name, address, appearance—those are mysteries." Rodolfo smiled. He seemed to enjoy his own ambiguity.

Manuel said, "Your client must know whom he wants nullified. You're talking nonsense."

Rodolfo shook his head. "Oh, no. Our client has told us how to find and identify this stranger, that's all."

Manuel sighed. "Why didn't you say so at once?"

"I wanted to see your face when you thought you were losing the chance to earn half a million cruzeiros," said Rodolfo maliciously.

Manuel slowly put down his coffee cup. "Did my expression amuse you, Rodolfo?" he said quietly. "Your own expression might be even more amusing if I should take your neck in my hand. So." Manuel clenched his right hand into a fist.

Rodolfo attempted his comradely smile. "*Perdao*. You are touchy, Photographer. I was joking, you understand."

"I wasn't," said Manuel. He paused, then went on as though no unfriendly words had passed between them. "How shall I find and identify this stranger?"

"By meeting tomorrow's Air France Concorde flight from Paris."

"He will be on it?"

"No. But a certain Maria da Costa will be on it."

Manuel filed the name away in his mind. "And—?"

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"Someone will meet her at the airport," Rodolfo said. "And that ɔmeone will be the stranger."

Manuel nodded. "How shall I recognize Maria da Costa?"

Rodolfo brought from a jacket pocket a folded page, torn from a ıagazine. "Behold her," he said.

Manuel scrutinized the color photographs of the young woman eproduced on the page. "A model?"

"A famous fashion model, I understand. Portuguese, but work- ng in Paris. Rather fetching, eh?"

"She would be if properly photographed," Manuel said. The pic- ures showed Maria da Costa to be a very tall, blonde, well- ɔrmed girl of about 25. Her high-cheekboned face was beautiful. I shall be able to recognize her at least. May I keep this page?"

Rodolfo nodded.

"Let me be sure of my assignment," said Manuel. "This woman vill arrive in Rio tomorrow aboard the Air France Concorde light. She will be met at the airport by a man whose identity we lo not yet know. And I am to nullify this stranger?"

Rodolfo waved a hand. "Correct. As soon as possible after you ıave identified him at the airport, but not, of course, in the pres- ɛnce of the woman." Rodolfo's long lips lifted in a sneer.

Manuel let that pass. "*Va bom,*" he said. "The usual proof, I ıuppose?"

"Naturally."

It was Manuel's turn to sneer. "What good will a photograph of he body do your client if he doesn't even know whose it is?"

"Let me worry about that." Rodolfo stood up. They shook hands ɔriefly. The handshake left crisp banknotes in Manuel's hand.

When the imminent arrival of the Air France Concorde flight vas announced over the airport loudspeakers, Manuel drifted ɛasually toward the arrival gate, an unremarkable figure in the ıcurrying crowd that was hastening in the same direction. It ıeemed that many *Cariocas* were curious to see the arrival of the ıupersonic plane that was still new enough on its Paris-to-Rio run ɔo excite awe and curiosity.

Manuel maneuvered himself into a position from which he vould be able to see clearly the arriving passengers as they de- ɔlaned from the Concorde and streamed through the gate in the ɔarrier toward the Customs counters. Unobtrusively his eyes ɛombed the jostling crowd that waited with him.

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He could hear the arriving Concorde before he saw it. Th thundering roar of its jets assailed his ears painfully. Yet whe the huge shape approached the airfield, gliding swiftly to eart with its nose section lowered from in-flight position to improv the pilot's view of the up-rushing runway, Manuel forgot his au ricular discomfort in admiration for this graceful machine tha could fly almost 6000 miles in seven hours.

Maria da Costa, reflected The Photographer, ought to be easy t recognize among the deplaning passengers. Like a rose amon weeds. So while keeping a watchful eye on the emptying plane, h also discreetly searched the crowd about him for the first clue t his intended victim.

Maria da Costa was the fifteenth passenger to appear in th exit hatch of the Concorde. At the top of the landing ramp, a though on an elevated stage, she paused for a moment, enor mously chic in a lettuce-green pants suit. A matching silk headscar restrained the charming disorder of her taffy-colored hair. Thick soled, chunky-heeled platform shoes accented her slenderness b making her seem taller than she was. A capacious tote bag of sof green leather dangled from one hand.

Manuel had a sudden urge to photograph this lovely mannequi as she posed so prettily outside the aircraft. He could sell the film he decided, at a solid price to *Rio Illustrated,* the fashionabl periodical for which he frequently supplied picture material. Bu he resisted the urge. He couldn't afford distraction in this crucia moment.

Maria da Costa descended the landing steps, reached the tar mac, and became a unit in the straggling line of exiting passen gers. Walking at her side and exchanging a few pleasant word with her from time to time was a middle-aged traveler in conser vative blue blazer and gray flannel trousers, who limped slightl and leaned on a cane as he walked. Her seatmate on the flight perhaps.

People in the crowd about Manuel began to shout greetings an wave as they spotted friends or relatives; concertedly, the crow behind the barrier moved slightly forward. Yet no one whom Manuel could detect showed special interest in Maria da Costa aside from the admiring male glances always directed toward an beautiful woman anywhere.

She passed through the exit gate. No one stepped forward to ac cost her. She paused again briefly, a puzzled frown wrinkling he

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delicate brows as she searched the crowd with her eyes.

No one greeted her. Manuel felt himself perspiring slightly. No one even waved to her. At length she sketched a shrug of shapely shoulders and followed the man with the cane through the gate into the Customs bay. Still no one approached her.

Manuel made himself inconspicuous behind a clump of passengers and stood nearby as she waited for her luggage to arrive from the plane. When it appeared, she pointed out to a porter two smart traveling bags in the same green leather as her handbag. The porter placed them on the Customs counter where they were opened and their contents inspected closely. The inspector seemed apologetic but very thorough for all of that. Manuel heard Maria da Costa murmur, "*Tenho nada a declarar.*" Nothing to declare. The inspector went through her tote bag anyway. Then, with a smile, he waved her through, and her porter led her across the terminal toward the taxi rank outside.

Manuel followed circumspectly yet closely enough to overhear the instructions she gave her taxi driver. "Hotel Saldhana," she said. "You know it?"

The driver said "*Sim*," clashed into gear, and pulled away.

At a brisk pace Manuel went to the airport car park and recovered his ancient sedan; he could think of only one thing to do under the circumstances—follow the model to her hotel and find out if anyone met her *there*. It made him almost physically ill to contemplate losing one-half of a million cruzeiros. But he, too, knew the Hotel Saldhana. And he knew that in his own car he could easily get to it before Maria da Costa's taxi arrived.

Thus, when the model entered the lobby of the Hotel Saldhana and approached the desk, Manuel was already lurking behind a potted palm 20 feet away. He heard the desk clerk acknowledge a reservation for Maria da Costa. He heard him summon a bellboy to help the model up to Room 216 with her luggage. And he saw Maria and her bellboy and her luggage disappear into the elevator a few moments later. He was left behind his potted palm in a bad temper.

A minute's reflection convinced him that again only one course of action seemed open to him—to keep Maria da Costa under observation until somebody *did* approach her and make contact. There were a hundred reasons why, he told himself, Rodolfo's mysterious stranger could have failed to meet Maria at the airport. A sudden illness, a traffic tie-up, inaccurate information on

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arrival time—anything. So reason indicated that somehow, sometime, the man would still appear.

The Photographer mounted to the second floor of the hotel by the firestairs. There he opened the firedoor into the corridor a crack and crouched behind it until Maria da Costa and her bellboy passed by and disappeared into a room ten steps down the corridor to Manuel's right. Room Number 216, presumably. After several minutes the bellboy went past the firedoor again, whistling, and presently Manuel heard the sound of the descending elevator.

He slid through the firedoor then, and walking silently to the door of 216 pressed his ear to it and listened intently. No sound came from within except the faint complaint of a wardrobe door as it moved on squeaky hinges. No voices. No mysterious stranger waiting to greet the model in her hotel room. Satisfied of that, Manuel returned to his firestairs post and settled himself to wait.

He had waited only a few minutes before the clanging elevator doors and footsteps in the corridor heralded the arrival of another guest. A man, this time, complete with a different bellboy and a large three-suiter case. The bellboy conducted his charge into Room 218—the one next to Maria da Costa's—and the door clicked shut behind them.

Manuel felt a stirring of excitement. For he had seen this arriving guest before. Less than an hour ago at Santos Dumont Airport. Blue blazer, gray trousers, slight limp, using a cane. And walking with Maria da Costa as they left the Concorde that had brought them from Paris.

Soon the bellboy came out of 218 and went away. And a few minutes later the man with the cane emerged. He took a few steps to the door of Room 216, looking sharply about him to be sure he was alone in the corridor, then rang the buzzer beside Maria da Costa's door.

Manuel, watching, nodded in satisfaction. At last, he thought, the action begins. From his vantage point he could hear what the stranger said. His first words, evidently in answer to a question called through the door, were, "Joseph Martin, Miss da Costa. Your seatmate on the Concorde flight this morning. Remember me?" He spoke Portuguese with an odd accent. Italian, perhaps. Or American? "Are you decent? May I come in for a moment, please?"

There was a second's pause. "Because," Martin said, "I think I

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should inform you of something I noticed at the airport."

Another brief pause. Then Manuel heard the metallic rattle of Maria's door chain. The door opened. Mr. Joseph Martin went into Room 216. And the door closed firmly once more.

Manuel knew frustration. He wanted very badly to know what would happen in Room 216. Yet to listen at Maria da Costa's door for more than a moment would be to risk discovery by anyone using the hotel corridor. Considering the door to Room 214, the room on the other side of Maria da Costa's and diagonally across the corridor from Manuel's firestairs observation post, he decided to take a long chance. He stepped through the firedoor and glided across the corridor, groping the while in his camera case for the bundle of skeleton keys he invariably carried there.

He knocked softly on the door of 214, disdaining the buzzer as too loud. He waited briefly. When no one responded, he went rapidly to work on the doorknob lock. It was of simple construction, he noted at once, like most hotel locks. The second key he tried fitted it perfectly. He opened the door, slid through, and closed the door behind him in one continuous silent motion.

Inside, the shades were drawn. The room smelled musty and unaired. Manuel breathed a sigh of relief. Unoccupied, plainly. One glance revealed a connecting door, now closed and locked with a sliding bolt, to Maria da Costa's adjoining room. Evidently, the two rooms could be rented as a suite if required. Manuel placed an urgent ear against this connecting door.

To his intense satisfaction Joseph Martin's voice came to him quite clearly through the door panels. "I know all that, Miss da Costa. I'm sorry about it. And you're perfectly right to demand an explanation. I fully intended to identify myself to you at the airport, of course—"

Maria's voice cut him off abruptly. "*Talvez*," she said. "Perhaps. But I have only your word for all this, Senhor Martin. I was told you would meet me at the airport, not at this hotel. How did you find me here, may I ask?" Her voice was as cold as a glacier dripping.

Martin answered placatingly, "I reserved this room for you, weeks ago. And I reserved the one next door for myself at the same time. I thought it would be wise for us to stick together as closely as we respectably could until we took off for Miami tomorrow."

Manuel, listening intently, raised an eyebrow at this.

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Maria, far from mollified, was saying, "Instead of meeting me at the airport and escorting me to this hotel as I was told you would, you are asking me to believe that you flew to Paris yesterday in order to fly back here with me today?"

"It was actually a very sound idea, Maria," Martin said. He used her first name quite casually. "Don't you get it? That way, I could check personally on whether or not you—ah—managed the Customs inspections successfully. And whether there was any danger that we might be apprehended."

"We!" Maria was scathing. "What you mean is, if I had been *un*successful in passing Customs inspection today, you would have faded discreetly away, uninvolved and unsuspected! Isn't that it?"

"Roughly, yes, you might say that's it." Martin was not apologetic; he seemed slightly amused. "Must I remind you, Maria, that this is a big operation? Very big. And I didn't want any featherheaded fashion model messing it up for me if I could help it!" He laughed. "Now, of course, I know you're *not* featherheaded, but I didn't know it yesterday, did I? Just because Armand said you could bring it off and that he'd protect my anonymity—"

"Armand trusted me, and you should have trusted him." Maria's voice was still stiff.

There were a few moments of silence. Then Martin remarked in a lighter tone, "Armand certainly has clever ideas about moving the goods, anyway, I'll grant him that. Are they the ones?"

"They're the ones, yes."

"No wonder you fooled the inspectors. If they knew, they'd kick themselves!"

Maria wasn't to be put off by flattery. She said, "Why didn't you identify yourself to me at the airport *after* I passed Customs inspection, then?"

"That's what I came to tell you about. At the airport I thought I recognized a man who *did* meet our plane. He was extremely interested in you, Maria. He followed you into the Customs shed when you got off the plane with me. He watched you closely while your luggage was being inspected. Then he followed you to your taxi and maneuvered to hear your destination."

The room next door went very quiet. After a long pause Manuel heard Maria say, "You recognized this man, you say? Who was he?" She cleared her throat. "And why was he spying on me?"

"I *think* I recognized him," said Martin carefully. "If I am right, he handles—ah—special assignments for an organization here in

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Brazil called The Big Ones. I have never met him, but once, long ago, before I began to operate independently, I saw him. The Big Ones lent him to us in Miami to solve a mutual problem. He is called The Photographer, as I recall."

"Did he solve the problem?" asked Maria.

"Admirably. That's why his presence at the airport today upset me. I thought it wiser not to identify myself to you until we know what he is up to. He knows you came to this hotel. And if"—Martin's voice grew reflective—"someone in Rio de Janeiro considers *you* a problem, my dear, or the precious goods you carry an irresistible temptation. . ." His words trailed into silence.

"I might not be alive to fly with you to Miami tomorrow?"

"Exactly. And we wouldn't want that to happen, would we?"

"God forbid!" said Maria in a voice of fear. Yet to Manuel, listening transfixed, there seemed to be something more than fear in Maria's voice—a thin thread of relief, even of satisfaction. Could that be possible? If so, there was only one explanation for it that Manuel could think of.

"So you must be very careful until plane time tomorrow," Martin was speaking again. "Stay in this room. Don't open your door to anyone. Except me. And then only if you're *sure* it's me. I'm in Room 218, next door, within easy reach. A double knock on this wall between our rooms will bring me instantly in case of need." There was a slithering sound. "I am not entirely helpless, as you see, Maria, although I am lame."

"I see. Thank you, Senhor Martin," said Maria in a small voice, subdued. "I'll do as you say. I'm sorry I blamed you about the airport business. And you may be very sure I'll call you at once if I need you. Two knocks on the wall. I'll remember."

The next sound Manuel heard was Maria's door closing and her security chain going up again as Joseph Martin returned to his own room.

Without haste Manuel took a business card from his wallet—MANUEL ANDRADAS, MASTER PHOTOGRAPHER—and wrote six words on its back with his pocket pen: *I am here. Let me in.* Then he slipped all but a corner of the card under the connecting door between his and Maria's room. This done, he scratched lightly on the panels of the door and waited tensely, watching the projecting corner of his card on the carpet.

For what seemed a long time nothing happened. Then suddenly the corner of his card disappeared under the door. Again there

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was a pause, during which Manuel quietly slid back the bolt that secured his side of the connecting door. Another pause. Then he could hear the bolt on Maria's side drawn slowly back. Manuel pulled the door open.

Maria's face was unnaturally pale as she motioned him silently into her room. He bowed and entered, leaving the connecting door ajar. He laid a finger on his lips and cautioned her in a whisper, "Do not speak aloud. Just nod or shake your head. You know who I am?"

She nodded.

"And why I met you at the airport?"

She seemed torn. At length she gave a ragged nod. Manuel breathed easier—he had been right. He whispered, "Then *you* are the client who retained The Big Ones to nullify Senhor Joseph Martin?"

She shook her head.

"Armand, then?"

She gave him a startled look before she realized that he must have heard that name while eavesdropping. She nodded.

"Thank you," whispered Manuel politely. "Now I know enough to carry out my assignment. And I shall do so. Presently. Meanwhile, who is Armand?"

She broke the imposed silence. A whisper. "My employer in Paris. A couturier."

"And without offense, Senhorina, your lover?"

She colored. Her nod was hardly a nod at all.

"And it's for him you're doing this smuggling?"

Maria da Costa stared at him stonily. Her head didn't move.

"I heard everything through the door," he reminded her. "Drugs?"

When she refused to answer, Manuel went on smoothly, "Whatever it is, your Armand arranged with Joseph Martin to have you smuggle it into Brazil today, and into the United States tomorrow? Is that right?"

Another nod.

"Then obviously, since Armand contracted to have Senhor Martin nullified," said Manuel, "you are calling off the original deal with Senhor Martin. To put it bluntly, you are double-crossing Senhor Martin."

Again Maria da Costa broke silence. "The Big Ones offered us a much better price." Her whisper was barely audible.

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Here was reasoning that Manuel could understand. "The Big Ones?" he repeated in surprise. "Indeed?" He gave Maria a flat stare, not noticing her, his thoughts churning. Then he put a firm but respectful hand on her elbow and led her through the connecting door into the shaded dimness of Room 214. He closed the connecting door after them. "Now," he said, "we can talk without fear of Senhor Martin overhearing us."

"What more is there to talk about?" asked Maria aloofly. "You can now complete your assignment, can you not? Senhor Martin is but two rooms away." She glanced around her at the dim mustiness of Room 214. "If you could break so quietly into this room," she said, "you should have no trouble with his."

"I anticipate none," Manuel answered. "Still, with your permission, I should like to join the bidding for whatever contraband you smuggled into Rio today."

"You?" she said incredulously.

"Me."

"Are you serious?" She sank into a chair. He had her interest, at least. "What price can *you* offer?"

"Your life," Manuel said quietly.

Even in the gloom of 214 he could see the model's eyes widen. "You'd kill me?"

"That would not be necessary, I think. Senhor Martin would no doubt take care of that himself if I were to tell him the truth about your new deal with The Big Ones."

She said without much conviction, "You wouldn't dare! That would be a deliberate double-cross of your own employers!"

He shook his head. "Not at all. I should merely delay carrying out my assignment on Senhor Martin—until after he has taken care of you." He paused. "My employers would never know. And your contraband would disappear with you. Besides, who are you, Senhorita, to talk of double-cross?"

Maria da Costa lapsed into silence. Small white teeth worried her lower lip.

"Come," Manuel said in a matter-of-fact tone, "I urge you to be sensible about this. It is very simple." He shot a sharp glance at her. "First, tell me the nature of your contraband."

"I will not." She lifted her chin and looked defiantly into his eyes.

He recognized spirit when he saw it. He said, "Let me guess, then. Almost certainly, it is heroin, uncut. And why heroin?" He

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ticked off his points on his fingers. "First, because it originates in France, famous for processing the opium of many poppy-growing countries. Second, it is offered by a Parisian couturier—your Armand—who, by the very nature of his business, has countless opportunities to obtain supplies of the drug. Third, though Senhor Martin refers to it as a big operation, implying something of substantial value, the contraband must be of relatively insignificant bulk, since you presumably smuggled it in on your person. And lastly, it was destined originally, before your counter-arrangement, for the North American market by way of Miami, where most drugs make their way into the United States. Therefore, I guess heroin. Am I right?"

Maria da Costa said nothing.

"Further," Manuel went on serenely, "it is my guess that The Big Ones have no knowledge of the exact amount of heroin you are bringing them. They have offered you and Armand so much an ounce or a pound for it, in the usual way. Correct?"

Stubborn silence.

"Ah, well, if I am right, Senhorita, no one will miss a few ounces when you consummate your deal with The Big Ones. I am not being greedy, you see. A few ounces only is all I ask. With the proceeds from the remainder, you can return happily to your beloved Armand and live in luxury with him forever if you choose. Your choice is quite simple. A few ounces of heroin for me—or death for you. Am I clear?"

"Very clear," said Maria. Then, capitulating, "It *is* heroin, as you guessed. And you shall have your few ounces." She tightened her lips. "But only after Senhor Martin is—what do you call it?—nullified."

Manuel said, "You understand that if you hope to see your Armand again, you will make no mention to The Big Ones of this private business between us?"

"I am not a child," said Maria, lifting her head, "to pile one double-cross on another."

Manuel grinned. "Good. Then only two things remain to be settled. One, what was the weapon Senhor Martin showed you just now?"

"A sword in his cane."

Manuel nodded. "And finally, where do you carry the heroin? What trick of concealment would make Customs inspectors kick themselves if they knew of it?"

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"First," said Maria, "nullify Joseph Martin." She stood up. "Then you shall know."

Manuel found himself admiring this tough-minded young woman. He said, "Perhaps I already know. I can think of only one reason why a fashion model like you, already taller than is considered quite chic, adds another inch and a half to her height by wearing platform shoes like those you have on, especially with such capacious heels."

Maria burst out laughing. "Nothing escapes you, does it?"

With dignity, Manuel replied, "I am a photographer, Senhorita. Photographers notice such things." He went to the connecting door between Rooms 214 and 216. "Remain here, if you please," he said to Maria as he left her. "I won't be long."

He went into her room, shutting the connecting door behind him. A moment later Maria heard him knock twice on the far wall to summon Joseph Martin to his reckoning.

The following evening, a little before sunset, Manuel met Rodolfo at a secluded bench in the Botanical Gardens and handed him a photograph.

Glancing at it, Rodolfo said, "Any trouble?"

"None. Except that he failed to meet the lady at the airport as advertised. In fact, he flew in with her on the Concorde from Paris. I had to follow her to her hotel before he contacted her. After that, it was simple."

Rodolfo said, "I can see it was." Manuel's picture showed Senhor Martin hanging by the collar of his jacket from a hook in a large wardrobe. Judging from his face, Senhor Martin had been strangled. In any event, it was clear that he was dead.

"A wardrobe," Rodolfo said maliciously, "is not a very original hiding place."

"He won't be found for a while. That wardrobe is in an unoccupied room."

"It doesn't make much difference anyway."

"How is that?"

"Our client left Rio earlier today. Your proof wasn't needed."

Manuel smiled. "Then I can have the balance of my fee at once?"

Rodolfo handed him a bundle of currency. "Count it."

Manuel counted it carefully. "All here. Thanks, Rodolfo. Let me know when you need me again." He stood up to leave.

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Rodolfo asked curiously, "Why are you using that cane? Did you sprain an ankle?"

"No." Manuel nodded at the photograph Rodolfo still held in his hand. "*He* was carrying it when we met."

"You stole it? That was foolish. It could lead the police to you."

"I decided to risk that. Look, Rodolfo." As though on impulse, Manuel gave the handle of the cane a hard twist. It came away in his hand. "You see," the Photographer said, "the cane is hollow."

Rodolfo, in the failing light, leaned forward to look inside the cane. "What's the white powder?"

Manuel shrugged. "I'm not sure. I'm no chemical expert. It occurred to me that it might be heroin."

Rodolfo froze momentarily. "Heroin? Impossible." He moistened a fingertip and tasted the white powder. "Cornstarch, I think," he said. "Definitely not heroin."

"Too bad," said Manuel. "But if you don't mind, Rodolfo, I think I shall seek a second opinion."

"Wait." Rodolfo pulled him down to the bench again. "From whom?"

Without expression Manuel said, "The Customs inspector at the airport, perhaps."

Rodolfo ignored this. "From whom?" he said again.

"I have a very good friend in Miami who is knowledgeable about these matters, Rodolfo. If this powder does turn out to be heroin, it will be worth a lot of money, and my friend in Miami will no doubt make me an offer for it. He represents your sister organization in North America."

Rodolfo kept his hand on Manuel's arm. "Why go to so much trouble? The Big Ones will pay you a better price for your powder than those people."

"For cornstarch?" Manuel asked drily.

"I was joking about the cornstarch."

"I was, too, about the Customs inspector. But not about my friend in Miami."

"I understand. So let me discuss this matter with my superiors, what do you say? For a ten percent commission I can keep your name out of it entirely." Rodolfo's eyes in the setting sun had the hard shine of cupidity.

Manuel paused for a long moment. Then he said, "All right, Rodolfo. But please make haste, will you? And get the best price you can. If I can keep only eighty percent of it. . ."

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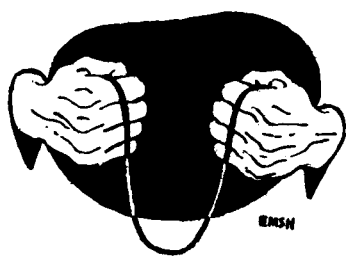
"Why only eighty percent?" Rodolfo was puzzled.

"Ten percent for your commission," said Manuel with a smile, "and another ten percent as an anonymous gift to The Drug Rehabilitation Institute leave only eighty percent for me."

Rodolfo, stunned, said, "The Drug Rehabilitation Institute?"

"Certainly. I look upon all drugs with repugnance, Rodolfo. They are an abomination. Degenerate, destructive, utterly immoral. So my gift to the Institute is a matter of conscience, you see." He coughed. "My own small contribution to the fight against them."

Rodolfo wanted to laugh, but he looked into the Photographer's eyes and decided against it.



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a *NEW* crime story by
RUTH RENDELL

Daniel Derbyshire was a successful businessman—wealthy, well-known, willful. And ruthless. He would let nothing stand in the way of his getting what he wanted out of life, including four wives—Joy, Vivien, Jane, and Prunella. When he wanted another woman—well, "Daniel was used to discarding wives" . . .

THE PRICE OF JOY

by *RUTH RENDELL*

Daniel Derbyshire had once seen a cartoon in which a thug held a woman captive and bound while his henchman, on the telephone for a ransom, was remarking, "Her husband don't answer. There's just hysterical laughter." For a while he kept the newspaper in which it appeared and thought of cutting out the cartoon and pinning it to his office wall. But it was in deplorable taste, so he threw it away.

He was 50 and rich. The newspapers, when they mentioned him, referred to him as a tycoon. In the past they had been in the habit of mentioning him quite often, for his successes, for his business coups, and for the fact that he had been married four times. His first wife was named Joy. She was the mother of his children, and he had been happy with her until a crescendo of success, building up fast but not too fast for him to cope with it, altered his style of living and made Joy appear to him as suburban and commonplace.

At his request she had divorced him so that he could marry Vivien, who in her turn had divorced him so that he could marry Jane. In common with Henry the Eighth, he had had one wife who had set him free by dying before he could rid himself of her, and his Jane, like Henry's, had died. After her death, when he was 45, he had married Prunella.

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At the age they had been—she was six years his junior—men and women are supposed to know their own minds. At last, he thought, he had found someone with whom he could settle down comfortably for the remainder of his life. But her dullness, when the first flush of sexual novelty was over, had nearly driven him mad. What, he sometimes wondered, in her education and her experience, had led her to believe that a man of his sort worth five millions wanted love in a cottage, with cosy, suffocating evenings at home, a quiet society-shirking life? It never occurred to him to answer that it was he who had led her to believe it.

And then he met Joy again.

Of course, they had never entirely lost touch. The upbringing of their children, of whom she'd had custody, had seen to that. But for years they had communicated with each other mostly through their lawyers and by way of messages carried from one to the other by their now grown-up children. Five years after his fourth marriage he met Joy at a party, quite by chance.

It was remarkable what the years had done. As a girl, Joy had been rather plain. At 52 she was statuesque, elegant, her carefully dressed silver hair surmounting a face that was handsome, wise, and sardonic. The alimony she'd had from him had enabled her to travel and buy a mews house in Mayfair. She had met many men, though she had never remarried.

Joy, when young, had never been desired by any man but himself, but now she was surrounded by men—as he learned when he telephoned her as, these days, he often did. And then, after asking him how he was, she would tell him to hold on for a moment, and he would hear her whisper, "Oh, Philip, bring me an ashtray, would you?" or "That's the front doorbell, John. Be an angel and see to it, my dear."

Her attraction for others made her even more attractive to him. He wanted her again. He saw, in what he observed of her lifestyle and her manners and her dress, that she would be a perfect hostess for him, entertaining his friends as Prunella never could.

He wanted her apart from that. Those children of his would have stared in disbelief had they known with what youthful lust he wanted her, as if they had never made love all those years ago, never become parents together, and he had never grown weary of her.

"You really want to marry me again, Dan?"

"You know I do," he said. "We should never have separated."

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"It was you who separated us. You broke my heart."

"They say it's never too late to mend, Joy. Let me mend it."

"And what," said Joy, "about Prunella?"

One can get used to anything, and Daniel was used to discarding wives. The cumbersome and frightening machinery of the law which keeps many ill-matched couples together, the crippling payments demanded, held no fear for him. "That won't last, anyway," he said. "I'll get a quiet divorce fixed up, one of those incompatibility jobs."

"Not on my account, you won't," said Joy. "Maybe Vivien didn't care about me when she got hold of you, but I'm thirty years older than she was and I do care. I like Prunella, what I've seen of her, and I won't do to her what Vivien did to me."

"Are you saying you don't want to marry me?"

"No. I'd like to marry you again. I'm still very fond of you, Dan. If Prunella were in love with someone else and left you, that would be a different story."

"Or if she were to die, I suppose?"

"Of course. But don't have any ideas about getting rid of her, please. I wouldn't put it past you. You're always quite ruthless about getting what you want, and then when you've got it you don't want it any more."

Daniel, however, hadn't the remotest notion of murdering his wife, and Joy's suggestion slightly shocked him. But those failings in Prunella which had always irritated him now fanned his exasperation to fever pitch. He was more than ever impatient with her timidity which made her shy of appearing with him at distinguished functions, frightened to drive her own car in London, and unwilling to make the simple speech required of her when asked to open the fête in the village where they had their weekend home.

He was nearly enraged when she refused an invitation for them to join a party on a peer's yacht on the grounds that they liked to spend their holidays alone together and quietly in the country. And it was particularly annoying that at this time there appeared in a Sunday-paper supplement an effusive feature about his private life, with many colored photographs of himself and Prunella in tweeds, himself and Prunella with bounding dogs, himself and Prunella confronting each other tenderly against the background of a log fire.

The captions and text were even worse. Had he really said

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those things? Had he truly told that reporter that he had come home to port after a long voyage on stormy seas? Had he claimed to have found the Right Woman at last after so much trial and error? He was obliged to admit that he had. But those feature stories take so long to appear, and he had said all those embarrassing things long before he had re-encountered Joy.

The idea that Prunella might fall in love with someone else and leave him—that was an attractive idea. But he was too hard-headed and too much of a realist to hope seriously for it. Though Prunella was eight years younger than Joy, in his eyes she looked older. And she never met any men except the happily married José who, with his wife, kept house for them, and the elderly driver of the minicab she employed whenever she wanted to cross London to visit her mother. (How profoundly this annoyed Daniel, that she should be driven about in a car belonging to a shabby minicab company, when she could have used his Rolls-Royce and his chauffeur.)

Moreover, despite her total lack of dress sense, her preference for costume jewelry over diamonds and her taste for drinking sparkling champagne cider, Prunella was fond of money. She liked spending it on her mother, her sisters, and her scruffy nephews and nieces. She had a horse, eating its head off and growing fat in the country. The dogs alone—and they were her dogs—cost a thousand pounds a year in food and veterinary care.

If she left him for another man, he would, of course, contribute something toward her support, but that something would be nothing to what she could skin him for if he left her. And she knew it. She had the examples of Joy's and Vivien's alimony before her.

So Daniel did nothing—that is, he did nothing positive. His negative actions took the form of neglecting Prunella thoroughly, seldom going home before midnight, and phoning Joy every day. He saw Joy whenever she allowed him to, but that wasn't often.

"I lead such a hectic life, darling," she said on the phone. "For instance, there's Max's private viewing tonight, and naturally I shall be at the première of Ivan's film tomorrow—hold on a moment, would you? Be an angel and get me a drink, David—I'd like to see you, Dan, but really it's so difficult."

"It wouldn't be difficult if you wanted to," growled Daniel whose desires were greatly inflamed by all these references to the glossy living in which his first wife was taking part, and taking part, no doubt, with grace.

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"Not much use wanting, is there, Dan?—thank you, David, that's delicious—I'm afraid you've made your bed, my dear, and you must lie on it. With Prunella."

When they did meet she was affectionate and charming. But, no, she wouldn't have an affair with him. It was marriage or nothing, and she had to admit that, at her age, she did rather incline to the companionship and security of marriage.

"But we can be friends," she said sweetly, adding that things between him and Prunella couldn't be that bad. She too had seen the Sunday supplement in which they looked so cosy and contented with each other. "And they say the camera doesn't lie, Dan dear."

Things went on in this way for another six months. Daniel hung about after Joy like a lovesick adolescent, and Prunella took to spending two or three nights a week at her mother's. Then, one Monday lunchtime, he received a telephone call at work. His secretary was temporarily out of the room, and he took the call himself.

A man's voice said, "We have your wife."

"I beg your pardon?" said Daniel.

"You heard. We have your wife. There've been enough kidnapings lately for me not to have to spell it out. She's quite safe and nothing'll happen to her—if you pay up."

"I shall go straight to the police," said Daniel.

"Don't be so stupid. Good God, I'd have thought a bloke who's made your kind of money'd have had a bit more brains. Don't you read the papers? Haven't you ever read a thriller? You go to the police and we shall know. The moment the police get word of this I'll chop off your wife's right hand and send it to you by first-class mail."

"You must be mad."

"I'll call you at home. Seven sharp. You'd better be there." The phone went dead.

Daniel sent for his secretary, told her he was feeling unwell, and to cancel the conference scheduled for that afternoon. His chauffeur drove him home. The first thing he did was ask José where Mrs. Derbyshire was.

"She left by cab at ten this morning, sir, to see her mother."

But Prunella's mother hadn't seen her since the previous Friday. Daniel told her some reassuring lie, then phoned the minicab company. The boss answered.

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"Jim was to pick her up at ten, you say? Hang on. Did you pick up Mrs. Derbyshire this morning, Jim? No? No, he didn't, Mr. Derbyshire. The booking was canceled by phone at nine thirty."

The gang, whoever they were, must have known Prunella's movements thoroughly, canceled her booking, and sent a substitute of their own. He wondered where they were holding her and what sort of ransom they were going to ask. At 7:00 he found out.

"Hallo again," said the same voice. "Sitting comfortably? Good. I suppose you're very fond of your wife, aren't you?"

"Of course I am," said Daniel.

"Of course you are. As a matter of fact, it was all those pictures of domestic bliss in that rag that gave us the idea."

Daniel cursed the Sunday supplement. Nothing but trouble had come of it. First it had set Joy against him, and now there was this. "Get on with it," he snapped.

"Since you're so fond of your wife, you'd pay anything to get her back, wouldn't you? Mrs. Derbyshire has admitted to us—under a little pressure—that you're worth five millions. So two hundred and fifty thousand pounds wouldn't be asking too much, now, would it?"

"A quarter of a million?" said Daniel, aghast.

"Five percent of what you've got. You won't even notice it. Like to talk to your wife?"

Before Daniel could reply, Prunella had come on the line.

"Oh, Dan, you will give them what they want, won't you? I'm sorry I told them you were so rich, but they made me."

"Are you all right, Pru?"

"At the moment, but I'm cold and I'm frightened." She gave a little sob. "I want to go home. I want to get out of here." A shriek followed as if someone had stuck a pin in her.

The man came back on.

"A quarter of a million in twenty-pound notes," he said. "I quite understand it'll take a day or two to get it. It's Monday now, so we'll say Thursday for delivery date, Thursday evening. You can go to your stockbroker in the morning. Go, not phone. We'll have his premises under observation. If you don't go, I'll send you your wife's left little toe in a matchbox. Call you tomorrow, two o'clock. Okay?"

A couple of sleeping pills afforded Daniel a night's rest. He went into the office as usual. Naturally, he must phone the police—it was a citizen's duty to do that, however unpleasant the

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consequences. If everyone in this kind of trouble went straight to the police, there would be less of this kidnaping nonsense.

On the other hand, the idea of Prunella's being mutilated wasn't agreeable to think of. She had nice hands, though he was obliged to confess he couldn't remember what her toes looked like. His stockbroker would think it very odd to sell shares at this time amounting to £250,000. Presumably, his bank would have to be notified in advance, as they certainly wouldn't have a quarter of a million lying about in twenty-pound notes. By two o'clock he hadn't phoned the police or been to see his stockbroker. The phone rang.

"You didn't go," the voice said, and there came the sound of a woman's scream. Daniel shuddered. He thought of that horrible cartoon which wasn't at all true to life.

"You damn—" he began. "You lowdown filthy swine."

"There's no need to be rude. If her toe doesn't come in the morning, blame the post office. They've not been too reliable lately. Go to your stockbroker. Now."

Daniel went. His stockbroker told him it was a very bad time to sell, and wouldn't Mr. Derbyshire reconsider? Sure that the scream he had heard was made by Prunella while in the process of having her toe amputated, Daniel said no, he wouldn't reconsider. Back home, he drank a lot of brandy. He thought of phoning Joy, and then thought better of it. He told José that Prunella was staying with her mother, and he told her mother that Prunella had gone to the country.

The next two days were extremely unpleasant. The man phoned four times, but Daniel wasn't allowed to speak to Prunella who, he was told, was "feeling too unwell." On Thursday morning the man said, "You'll be collecting the cash today, right? Put it in a suitcase, and at seven sharp take the suitcase to Charing Cross Station. Leave it there in a left-luggage locker, and this is what you're to do with the key. Take it into the Embankment Gardens and push it into the earth on the left-hand side of the statue of Sir Arthur Sullivan. Got that? The statue's the one of the old boy with this woman crying and draping herself about. Muse of music or something. As a matter of fact, she reminds me of your wife. Especially at this moment. If you take the police with you or don't bring the cash, I won't be back here by eight thirty. And if I'm not back here by eight thirty, we cut Mrs. Derbyshire's throat. She's had some experience of the knife already, and she doesn't like it."

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Trembling, Daniel took the morning papers which his secretary handed him. On the front page of the top one was a photograph of Princess Anne at a charity performance of *Firebird*, and in the background could be seen Joy, holding the arm of a tall handsome man. He let out a groan.

"Are you all right, Mr. Derbyshire?" his secretary asked.

"Yes—that is, no. Never mind. Call me a cab, will you? I have to go to my bank."

The bank provided him with a guard to escort him and his large suitcase back to the Derbyshire Building. Daniel put the suitcase under his desk and stared at it. A quarter of a million. What a price to pay for a woman you don't even want! He had intended, within the next few months, to settle just this amount on his son and the same amount on his daughter. That, now, would be impossible. And they might kill Prunella anyway. It would be a fine thing to lose the money *and* Prunella.

On the other hand, wouldn't it literally be a *fine* thing? Daniel didn't think it would bother him so much to rob his children of part of their patrimony if by parting with that money he could rid himself of Prunella for good.

Immediately he castigated himself for the thought. But it kept returning. What a pity the kidnapers didn't have a keener insight, and had said instead that for a quarter of a million they would kill his wife . . . He must be overwrought, he thought, his mind unhinged by all this anxiety.

Five o'clock. He sent his secretary home and then he opened the large suitcase. The notes were new and crisp and pale lilac in color—12,500 of them in packets. It was a great deal of money, a queen's ransom. But he would willingly and happily have parted with it if it could have bought him Joy. Instead, it was going to buy him Prunella.

At this point a terrible thought came to Daniel. Until now he had considered going to the police, considered stalling, but he had never considered simply *not paying*. And yet what a fool he was to think it would have been preferable if the man had asked for money to kill her rather than to save her! To kill her need cost him nothing. All he had to do was not pay. Wasn't this, in fact, the answer to the dilemma by which he had been beset for nearly a year?

But poor Prunella, frightened, lonely, cold, maltreated. She was his wife, and once he had loved her. He owed it to her to try to

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save her. Having closed the suitcase, he sent for his chauffeur and went home.

"Don't put the car away, George. I shall need you again at six thirty."

He took the suitcase into his study. Prunella would be back with him by—when? Ten? Midnight? Without, very likely, one of her toes. Still, that hadn't been his fault. Not really. It was disagreeable to think of anyone being killed by having her throat cut. But was there any *agreeable* way of being killed?

Suicide was a different matter. Obviously it would be preferable to kill oneself with pills and liquor rather than by hanging. But if one were going to *be* killed, there seemed very little to choose between being strangled or blindfolded and shot or run over by a car. There wasn't a nice way of dying by someone else's violence.

They would kill her anyway, he thought. They wouldn't dare take the risk of her later being able to identify them. And he would have thrown that quarter of a million away just as effectively as if he had sunk it in the Thames. Besides, there was always the chance they wouldn't kill her and the money be lost anyway.

At 6:15 he had another look inside the suitcase. Already, by what he had done, he had lost a couple of days' interest on that money. They would kill Prunella and dump her body by some roadside. The police would see that he'd had the money ready and realize that the gang had killed his wife before he'd had time to pay the ransom. The British public would sympathize with him and understand when, in his grief, he tried to heal his broken heart by remarrying his first wife, the mother of his children.

Six thirty. The Rolls-Royce stood waiting on the driveway. Daniel poured himself a large brandy. He waited till 6:40 and then rang the bell for his chauffeur.

"Put the car away, George. I won't be needing it again tonight."

José served him his solitary dinner at 7:15. Daniel took one mouthful of soup, gagged and rushed to the bathroom where he was sick.

The man phoned at 9:00. Prunella was still alive, minus a hand and a toe. It wasn't very nice for her because they couldn't, under the circumstances, call a doctor to attend her.

The man said, "Follow the prescribed procedure at nine in the morning, Charing Cross Station and the locker key in the earth by the Sullivan statue."

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Daniel didn't sleep at all. He kept on throwing up all night, but he didn't take the suitcase to the station in the morning.

All that day there was no sign from the kidnapers. Late that evening the man phoned again. Daniel put the receiver down without speaking, and after that there were no more calls. His body had begun to twitch and jerk, sweat kept breaking out all over him, and his heartbeat was irregular, sometimes pounding and sometimes seeming to stop altogether in a very frightening way.

But on Saturday morning a great peace descended on him. It was over now, it must be. Prunella was dead, and after a decent interval he could go to Joy, a free, ardent wooer.

No work today. Having made up his mind to get in touch with the police during the next few hours—it would be a bit ticklish, thinking of the right things to say—he took Prunella's two Great Danes and the Dalmation out for a walk. When he got back he went straight into the study to plan his phone tactics with the police. The large suitcase was open on the desk, and Prunella was standing over it, examining its contents.

He felt himself turn white. He felt as if all the blood had rushed out of his tissues and charged into his heart to start up that hideous pounding once more.

"Thank God you're all right," he managed to whisper.

She faced him. She looked extremely well, though somewhat disgruntled. It was plain she had all her fingers and toes intact.

"What did you get the money for if you weren't going to pay up?"

"I was," said Daniel. "I was stalling."

"Like hell. You can come in now, Jim." Prunella opened the door to admit the minicab driver who looked much younger and far more strapping than Daniel remembered him. "Jim, this is my loving husband," she said. "Funny, I ought to have known it wouldn't work."

Daniel sat down. "Be kind enough to explain," he said icily.

"I've been in love with Jim for the past six months, but I knew I wouldn't get much out of you if I left you. And Jim's only got his minicab. So we figured this out. Sorry, Jim, I'm afraid this is it. He doesn't think I'm worth a quarter of a million, so I'll have to stay with him."

"Stay!" Daniel shouted. "I wouldn't have you here after what you've done for twice what's in that suitcase! Of all the filthy

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cruel tricks to play on anyone! You don't know what I've been through. This has probably caused permanent injury to my health. I've lost hundreds in interest on that money." He was choking with rage. "I'll divorce you and name that crook, and God help me, I won't give you a damned penny!"

"You haven't any proof," said Prunella, "and we won't give you any. From what José says, you've told everyone I've been with mother." She sighed. "Jim and I know when we're beaten. We shall part here and now forever."

"What were you going to do?" Daniel growled.

"Well, since you ask, Jim would have hung onto the cash, and after the fuss had died down I'd have left you and joined him. But that's out of the question now. It won't be very nice for me living with a man who doesn't care if I get my throat cut, but I haven't any choice." Prunella took her coat off. "And now I'd better see what José is doing about lunch. I'll try and be a better wife to you now, Dan, to make up for all the trouble I've caused. I won't go out so much and we'll stay in every evening together."

"You're crazy," said Daniel. "I won't stand for it. I'll leave you." But he couldn't. Joy wouldn't have him if he left her. He jumped up. "Don't you understand I don't want you!"

"Only too well," said Prunella, glancing at the suitcase, "but we'll get over that. We'll work at our marriage, we must. Goodbye, Jim. It was a fine idea while it lasted."

Daniel seized the suitcase, frantically fastening its clasps. "Take it," he shouted. "Take it and go."

"D'you mean that?" said the voice of the man on the phone. Jim grinned broadly. "Thanks a lot."

"Thank you, Dan. That's very generous of you. And just one other thing. May I take the dogs too?"

"Take what you like and get out of my house!"

He watched them go off down the street together, Jim carrying the quarter of a million in the suitcase, Prunella, one arm linked with his, the other holding the dogs on their triple leash. A large brandy steadied him. No one would believe that a man's own wife could do a thing like that. Of all the bare-faced abominable treachery! And those disgusting threats of mutilation while, no doubt, she'd been laughing in the background. God, how he'd have liked to smash them both! All he hoped now was that they'd get mugged, maimed for life, for the contents of that suitcase.

And then, as his rage cooled into seething resentment, he

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realized what had been achieved. He was free. Prunella had left him of her own accord. Within three or four months he could be divorced. He rang for George, got into the car, and told George to drive him to a certain mews in Mayfair.

Leaning back against the cushions, he thought of the price he had paid for Joy. Surely no woman of 52, once discarded, had ever before been purchased for a quarter of a million? One day he would tell her. When they were married. But she was worth it. He longed for her with the passion of a boy of 20, though when he was 20 and courting her for the first time, he had never felt this yearning and this tremulous urgency.

Thirty years ago he had gone to her in her father's house on his old motorbike; now he was going to her in a Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud, having paid a fortune for the privilege of asking her once more to be his wife. His heart raced. He ran up the steps of her house and rang the bell.

She opened the door herself. Daniel thought she looked 20 years younger, perhaps 30 years, yet far more lovely than when he had first seen her. Her silver hair was an anachronism above that youthful flushed face.

"Dan! How lovely. How nice of you to come."

She turned and led him into the living room before he could take her in his arms. There was a man standing by the table. Strange men kept appearing in his life today, but this one wasn't hiding. He was pouring champagne. Daniel observed vaguely that there were other people there too—strange people getting in his way on this day of all days.

He recognized the champagne pourer as Joy's escort in the newspaper photograph. She must get rid of him and all the others, he thought, and he turned to her impulsively, arrogantly. She smiled and took his arm.

"Dan dear," she said, "I want you to meet Paul. We were married this morning."

"Q"

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a *NEW* Interpol novelet by

EDWARD D. HOCH

Laura Charme, the charming agent for Interpol who, with Sebastian Blue, specializes in airline crimes, goes to Bermuda to find out why three commercial airline pilots have disappeared in the dreaded Bermuda Triangle, and stumbles on an equally mysterious triangle of a different sort . . . mystery, menace, and murder in a fully packed novelet that will puzzle and tantalize you until all the threads come together in a startling, even shocking, denouement . . .

INTERPOL: The Case of the Devil's Triangle

by *EDWARD D. HOCH*

Mona Furniss was seated on a bar stool in the Voyagers' Club when the man slid onto the stool next to her and ordered a drink. They didn't speak at once, but when the bartender had moved away to chat with a customer at the end of the bar, the man asked, "What did you tell your husband this time?"

Mona glanced at him and smiled. "The usual thing—bridge with the girls. It doesn't matter. The poor dope believes whatever I tell him."

"Good."

She slid her hand over until it covered his on the bar. "I've missed you, Chuck. I've wanted to be with you."

"Careful. You never know who might be watching."

She removed her hand. "Are you free tonight?"

"As soon as I take care of some business at the shop. Want to come along?"

"Sure."

They finished their drinks and she followed him out the back

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door of the bar onto the Walker Arcade. They turned left and headed toward the street of shops that faced Hamilton Harbor. Chuck always entered through the back door, because his connection with the Front Street Curio Shop was not widely known.

The small Chinese behind the counter nodded as they entered through the beaded curtains and said to Chuck, "American airman waiting to see you."

"Good." Chuck smiled over his shoulder at Mona. "The business never lets up. Thank you, Lin Yang."

She followed him into a private office where a middle-aged man with graying hair and a friendly smile was waiting. He rose and held out his hand. "Mr. Coral? I'm Steve Yardley. Guess I was a bit early for our appointment."

"Perfectly all right, Steve. What airline are you with?"

"Trans-American. Some of the boys told me about you."

Chuck smiled. Then, seeming to remember her presence, he said, "This is Mona."

"Hi, Mona."

"Hi, Steve." She wondered what he thought their relationship was. Whatever he thought, he'd be surprised to know the truth.

"So," Chuck said, "you're down here on vacation? Looking for a little action?"

"That's right. They tell me you have a special deal for airline pilots. A chance for a little excitement."

"The Bermuda Triangle," Chuck said. "There's nothing like it. Will tomorrow morning be okay? I can explain it all then."

"Fine, Shall I meet you here?"

"Out at the airfield would be best. I have a little flying school near the civil air terminal. I'll be there at eight."

"I'll find it," Yardley said and they shook hands.

Later Mona asked Chuck, "What about that pilot tomorrow?"

"Yardley will be number thirteen. I hope it's not unlucky for him."

As the British Airways jet from London landed at Bermuda Airport, Laura Charme was deciding the islands really did look like those sun-drenched photos they always featured in the travel brochures. It was a Thursday in July, and the airport temperature was a warm 85 when she left the building and hailed a taxi for the guest house in nearby St. George where she'd be staying.

But if she hoped to remain inconspicuous, that hope died early.

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"Aren't you Laura Charme, from Paris?" a handsome middle-aged man asked as she alighted from the taxi at her destination.

"Yes," she admitted, a bit reluctantly. "Should I know you?"

"George Furniss. We met briefly at the International Investigators Conference in Paris last year."

"Oh, yes, I remember now." All she really remembered was a group of interchangeable men around a table in the bar, praising a talk she'd given on airline crimes.

"So Interpol is finally investigating Bermuda," he said with a broad smile.

"Hardly. I'm here on holiday."

"Oh?" She could see he wasn't convinced. "Staying at the guest house here?"

"Yes." She paid the taxi driver and started up the walk with her suitcase.

"At least let me carry that, like a true Bermuda gentleman."

"Do you live nearby?"

"My wife and I have a small house just down the street. Come see us and meet Mona. You're welcome to use our swimming pool any time."

"Thank you, but I plan to keep pretty much to myself. That's what I take vacations for." She hoped she wasn't sounding rude.

He held open the screen door and let her pass before him. Lowering his voice a bit, he said, "I know I shouldn't have mentioned Interpol. Of course you're here on assignment. Don't worry, I won't breathe a word of it."

"Just what do you do here, Mr. Furniss?"

"Private security guards—I furnish them. Don't you remember? We talked about it in Paris."

"Vaguely," she admitted. "Is business good?"

"The security business is good everywhere these days. Bermuda has crime like everywhere else. You need exact change on the buses now, so the drivers don't need to carry any money. And we have tough laws about drugs and firearms. Even spear guns are illegal."

"But it seems such a peaceful place."

"Looks can be deceiving." He switched to a pleasanter topic. "But you really must let Mona and me show you a bit of the islands. We promise not to intrude on your privacy."

"Thank you," she replied. "You're very kind. Tell me, are there any rental cars to be had here?"

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"Not on Bermuda. But most visitors rent bicycles or motor-assisted cycles to get around. And of course there are taxis and buses."

"Thank you." She gave him a smile. "I'll probably be over to see you."

"I hope so."

After she was settled in her room, and before going out to dinner, Laura sent off a cablegram to Sebastian Blue back in Paris.

In the morning she rented a bright-red motor-assisted cycle and listened while a young man gave her brief instructions on its operation. Once back in France she'd driven a motorcycle, so she had no difficulty mastering this simpler version. Soon she was enjoying the scenery along Mullet Bay Road as if she'd been born on a cycle.

As she neared the airport causeway that led to the main island, she was overtaken by a girl in her early twenties who came cycling up behind her. "Hi! Beautiful day, isn't it?"

"Certainly is!" Laura agreed. "Your first time here?"

"Second, really. I was here last winter with another girl and liked it so much I came back." They'd stopped for the airport traffic and she held out her hand. "I'm June Wallace, from Boston."

"Laura Charme, from Paris."

"You're French!"

"Only half, really. But I work there. I just arrived yesterday."

June Wallace was wearing light green slacks and a striped blouse, and her long brown hair was tied back with a matching green ribbon. Laura thought she was quite attractive. "Have you been to the shops in Hamilton yet?" the girl asked.

"That's where I'm bound for now."

"I can show you a wonderful little place for sports and beach things. And fairly reasonable too."

They continued on together, taking the scenic North Shore Road past the aquarium and museum. "How long will you be here?" the American girl asked.

"A week, I expect," Laura said, feeling the refreshing ocean breeze on her face.

June Wallace swerved to avoid an oncoming bus. "Damn! Can't get used to riding on the left side! Going to kill myself one of these times."

Soon they were in the center of Hamilton's bustling shopping

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area, and after locking their cycles, were strolling past store windows crammed with exotic tourist lures. "I know a great place to have your fortune told!" June said as they passed a display of horoscopes and tarot cards. "Want to come with me tonight?"

"I'm not much for knowing the future," Laura admitted. "I've enough problems with the present."

"The man I'm going to see could help you. He's a regular wizard."

"Is he one of the tourist attractions?"

"For those in the know. He answers questions and afterwards gives private readings."

Laura smiled. "I guess you've talked me into it."

The meeting that evening was in a room at one of the big beach hotels facing Hamilton Harbor. There were perhaps 200 chairs arranged in neat rows, but the place was less than half full when the speaker, a black-bearded man named Vincent Tartor, appeared. Laura and June were seated in the third row, and Laura was suprised to see George Furniss across the aisle with a woman who apparently was his wife.

There was no doubt of Tartor's speaking ability, or of his knowledge of things mystical. After a brief talk he opened a question period and Laura raised her hand. "Just what is the Bermuda Triangle?"

The bearded man smiled indulgently. "A good question, and someone always asks it. The Bermuda Triangle is the area bounded roughly by a line connecting Bermuda, Puerto Rico, and Miami. A number of ships and planes are said to have vanished in this area, and theories about the disappearance range from magnetic disturbances to actions of extraterrestrial beings. Does that answer your question?"

Before she could reply, Tartor shifted his attention elsewhere. When the meeting finally broke up a half hour later with Tartor's announcement that there would be no personal readings that night, Laura found herself standing with George Furniss and his wife.

"So glad we ran into you here," he said. "Now you can meet Mona."

Mona Furniss smiled and held out a hand. She was a pretty young woman with blonde hair that nicely framed her face. "So pleased to meet you. George said you might join us at the pool."

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Furniss suggested a drink at the downstairs bar, and June Wallace joined them with a middle-aged man in tow. "This is Professor Charles Winstead," she said, introducing him to Laura. The Furnisses obviously knew him. "I'm taking a summer course with him at the college here."

"I always come to hear Tartor," the Professor said, speaking in a cultured voice. "Every Friday and Sunday night during the summer. Fascinating man."

When they were seated in the bar downstairs, Laura became aware that Tartor was there too, talking softly to a British-looking man wearing an expensive Bond Street suit. But the man's eyes were on Laura rather than his bearded companion.

"Who's that at the bar with Tartor?" she asked after a few moments.

George Furniss glanced around. "McKnight. Detective Inspector McKnight. I noticed him upstairs."

"Expensive clothes for a policeman," Laura remarked.

Furniss offered no comment. Then the cocktail conversation shifted to the islands, and Laura found a way to bring up the subject of the Bermuda Triangle again. "It's pure superstition," Professor Winstead insisted. "Superstition fostered by an irresponsible press. Planes and ships don't disappear without cause."

"But some have," Laura said. "Even recently. Last month there was that American airline pilot—Steve Yardley, wasn't it? Whatever happened to him?"

"He took off from the Bermuda airport in an old Cessna," George Furniss said, "according to the police reports. Nobody ever found out what he was doing here."

"Interesting," Winstead commented. "There are these occasional happenings that renew one's faith in the unknown."

"I thought you didn't believe!" June scoffed.

"I believe in the unknown. I believe in dark human forces and the corruption of man. I do not believe in Vincent Tartor and his sideshows, fascinating as the man is."

The waiter brought another round of drinks and the conversation shifted to Hamilton's shops and what was available at the various places along Front Street and Reid Street. Finally the party broke up, with June and Laura heading back to their cycles. George Furniss and his wife would be getting a taxi, and Professor Winstead apparently had a place in town.

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"Isn't it dangerous on these roads at night?" Laura asked June.

"No, there aren't that many private cars. I've been riding these cycles all summer. Come on!"

"Chuck?"

Coral looked down at her. "Someone might hear us."

"She was asking questions about Yardley. And she's Interpol!"

They were standing together in an alcove off the hotel lobby. Mona knew her voice was betraying the fear she felt, but she didn't care. Chuck Coral glanced both ways to make certain no one could overhear them, then said, "Get hold of yourself. She doesn't know anything."

"But she might find out! She said she visited a curio shop today!"

"Then arrange something if you're worried. An accident. At your pool."

"I couldn't do that, Chuck. It would be too close to home. Interpol's not dumb. They'd send others."

He took a deep breath. "They only just left, and Laura Charme was on the red cycle. Maybe something can be done tonight."

"By whom?"

"Lin Yang. He can take care of it."

It was toward morning when Laura was awakened by a pounding on her door. She rolled over and glanced at her travel clock, surprised that it was not yet six o'clock. "Who is it?" she called through the door, bundling her robe around her.

"Detective Inspector McKnight. Please open the door."

She opened it just a crack and recognized the man who'd been watching her from the bar, the one who'd been talking with Vincent Tartor. "What do you want? It's not even six o'clock!"

"I'm sorry, but there's been an accident. June Wallace is dead."

"June?" She allowed the door to swing open and he entered. He wasn't wearing the Bond Street suit now, only a pair of faded pants and an open-necked shirt. "What happened?"

"Looks like her cycle went off the road along Barrack Hill."

"But—"

"We think it was hit by a car." A trace of accusation?

"Only residents can have cars here."

"There are taxis," he reminded her. "And buses."

"You said an accident?"

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"Looks like it. But then again—" He started over. "You were with her yesterday and last night, Miss Charme. I've established that from witnesses. Did she say anything, imply anything, to make you think she feared for her life?"

Laura shook her head. "No, nothing at all. She seemed like a happy, carefree girl—the little I knew her."

"You came home together from Hamilton last night?"

"Yes. She was staying out on Cut Road, farther along than me. Her cycle was almost out of fuel and the gas stations close at seven, so I let her take my—" Laura froze. "Oh, my God!"

"What is it?"

"She was riding my cycle when she was killed. My red cycle." Laura sat down on the edge of the bed. She tried to get control of herself, so he wouldn't be able to read her thoughts.

They'd been trying to kill her, Laura. June Wallace had died by mistake.

It was nearly noon by the time Laura left the St. George police station and started back to her guest house. She'd told McKnight everything she knew, but had avoided dwelling too long on the change in cycles. If he suspected she was the intended victim, he didn't say so.

The first thing she did was to send another coded cablegram to Sebastian Blue at Interpol's Paris office. Then she sat down to think it through.

The killing had not been done personally by any of the people at the hotel the previous night, because she and June had been wearing different-colored slacks and blouses. Someone who'd seen them together would have recognized June in his car's headlights. But someone instructed by telephone to get the girl on the red cycle might easily have made the mistake. She thought she remembered a car following them at a distance, its headlights mere dots in the darkness.

It was, she knew, her question about Steve Yardley's disappearance that had prompted the desperate action. George Furniss knew she was Interpol, but she'd expected that. She'd chosen the guest house mainly because it was near Furniss's home, and if he hadn't seen her yesterday afternoon when she arrived, she would have found some excuse for a casual meeting.

But Furniss was not the man she sought. Before his disappearance Steve Yardley had mailed a postcard to his girl back in New

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York, a card that mentioned the name of Chuck Coral. *"Met Chuck Coral at a curio shop. He's arranging for tomorrow's flight."* Those were the last words from Yardley.

But it was more of a clue than they'd had in any of the other cases.

Something was luring commercial airline pilots to Bermuda. Something was bringing them from America and France and England and a half-dozen other countries. Something they didn't like to talk about. One pilot whom Sebastian interviewed in Paris had spoken vaguely of flying into the Bermuda Triangle as a sort of lark, but such motivation seemed unlikely. So far three pilots had disappeared in the area after taking off from Bermuda, and their purpose could only be guessed at. All had listed the flights as sightseeing excursions on their flight plans, and all had failed to return to the Bermuda airport.

Laura Charme had come to find out why.

On the previous day, wandering through the waterfront shops with June, she'd kept an eye out for curio shops. There were only two that used the phrase in their name—the Front Street Curio Shop and the Travelers' Curio Shop. She'd been in the Travelers' yesterday with June and had seen nothing suspicious.

Now, more to keep from thinking of June's death than in any hope of finding a lead, she set off for Hamilton and the Front Street shop. She rode June's bright-blue cycle with some trepidation, though the holstered .38 beneath her billowing blouse provided a measure of reassurance. Whether she could stop a car with a shot from the back of a moving cycle remained uncertain, but the weight of the weapon against her body gave her added courage.

As she entered the curio shop a half-hour later in Hamilton, she saw at once that there were no other customers. The Chinese clerk behind the counter smiled and bowed slightly, then returned to his task of dusting shelves. The air was thick with the odor of incense, but otherwise the shop seemed almost a duplicate of the one she'd visited the previous day. If this was where Yardley had met the man named Chuck Coral, there was nothing here to show it.

She picked up a jade figurine and made a pretense of studying it for a moment, then put it down and turned toward the door. The Chinese had got there before her. He'd locked the door and was flipping a sign in the window to indicate the shop was closed.

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"You'll have to let me out," she said quietly.

He smiled, and suddenly she saw the knife in his right hand. "This time I will kill the right one," he said, and lunged forward.

She had no time to reach her gun. She sidestepped, caught him in the neck with a well-aimed karate chop, and he went down hard.

Laura glanced toward the street, but beaded curtains had effectively hidden the brief flurry of action from outsiders. She kneeled and went quickly through the man's pockets. His name, she learned, was Lin Yang and he lived at a Hamilton address. She felt his pulse and knew he was still alive. Glancing around the shop, she decided to look for Mr. Chuck Coral.

In the back room she found a steep metal staircase leading to the second floor. She slipped the gun out of her waistband holster and started up.

If she'd expected a storeroom, she was surprised. The room above was a miniature studio apartment, complete with bed and kitchenette. She shifted the pistol to her left hand and began searching through the drawers of a dresser set against one wall. There was an assortment of men's clothing and a few feminine undergarments. Beneath these was a thin packet of letters. Laura put down the pistol and began to read them.

They were love letters—passionate, explicit—written to *Chuck* and sighed *Mona*. In one of them she read the sentence: *I don't know what George would do if he ever found out about us. Sometimes I think he would kill us both.*

Obviously Mona Furniss's lover was the mysterious Chuck Coral, and this was his apartment.

Continuing her search through the drawers and the single closet, Laura began to wonder. There were some sports clothes and robes, but no shoes or socks. There was toothpaste and a brush, but no books or magazines. The place had more the look of a love nest than of actual living quarters. It was a place where Chuck and Mona met, but not a place where he lived permanently.

Chuck Coral might have another identity—which would explain why she'd been able to discover nothing about him till now. He might even have been one of the men at the hotel last night, watching Mona and her husband together and inwardly gloating.

Laura read through the letters again, searching for some clue to "Chuck's" identity. But there was nothing. Putting down the letters, she took stock of what she knew. Mona Furniss and Chuck

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Coral were having an affair—in a sense it was another Bermuda Triangle—and Coral was involved in the disappearance of the pilot Steve Yardley. After her question about Yardley at the hotel last night, either Coral or Mona or both had ordered her murder. The Chinese clerk of the curio shop had been sent to do the job but had killed the wrong woman.

That much she knew. But there were too many unanswered questions. Who was Chuck Coral? And how was he enticing airline pilots to fly into the Bermuda Triangle? Were they really doing it for the pure thrill of it? Could that many intelligent, highly paid men believe in a foolish superstition, a media event?

She returned the letters carefully to their hiding place and went downstairs. No need for Coral to know she'd read them, even if he did know she'd been there.

The Chinese on the floor hadn't stirred, but he was still breathing. She stepped around him and unlocked the front door of the shop.

As she started out she almost ran into a middle-aged man with a friendly smile. "Oh, pardon me!" she said. Then, remembering the body on the floor, she pointed to the sign on the door and added, "The shop is closed."

"Is it? Do you know if Chuck Coral is in there?"

"No, he isn't." She took a deep breath. "But I work very closely with him. Perhaps I could help you."

"Maybe so, Miss. I had a little trouble and I thought I should see Mr. Coral as soon as I got back to Bermuda."

"Who are you?"

"My name is Steve Yardley."

Over a drink at a dockside bar she listened to Yardley's straightforward story. He'd heard about Coral's flying service back in the States and had come here on vacation to give it a try. He'd developed engine trouble about 950 miles southwest of Bermuda and crash-landed in the ocean not far from Cuba. A Cuban patrol boat had rescued him, but had held him for investigation without notifying the American authorities. He'd finally been released in Havana yesterday.

"Then you weren't really missing?"

He smiled at her. "I knew where I was all the time—in a detention center just outside Havana. I guess they thought I was a spy."

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"Your family will want to know you're back."

"I've wired them, and I'll try to call tonight."

Laura peered into his smiling face. "Just why did you make that flight in the first place? What was the purpose of it?"

Steve Yardley shrugged. "Adventure, I guess. Flying commercial airliners can be as dull as working in an office, after the first few thousand hours. There's something about the Bermuda Triangle that brings back the old adventure of the first time I flew. Coral's planes are old, for one thing, and can be flown without a copilot."

"Isn't a thousand miles a fairly long range for them? You said you were near Cuba."

"Oh, they can go lots farther than that," he replied casually.

And get back? Laura wondered silently. Aloud, she asked, "Was Chuck Coral alone when you met him at the curio shop?"

"There was a woman with him. I think he called her Mona."

"Can you give me a description of Coral?"

Steve Yardley shrugged. "Middle-aged, sort of ordinary."

She thought of Vincent Tartor. "Did he have a beard?"

"No."

"But you'd know him if you saw him again?"

"Oh, sure."

"Good. Because I'm going to show him to you."

"He's probably out at the airport. I got the idea he hung around there a lot."

"Let's go see." She finished her drink and paid the waiter. Then, remembering her cycle outside, she said, "We'd better take a taxi. But first I have to make a phone call."

While he waited she stepped into a booth and called Detective Inspector McKnight. When his familiar voice came on the line, she identified herself and said, "You can find the man who killed June Wallace at the Front Street Curio Shop. He's Chinese—a clerk in the shop. He'll probably deny everything, but if you examine his car carefully I'm sure you'll find some traces of red paint or other evidence that he hit the cycle."

The voice on the other end hesitated. "Where are you now, Miss Charme?"

"At a little restaurant down the block."

"You'd better wait there till I arrive."

"I don't think I can do that," Laura replied. "I'm not alone. You can reach me later." She hung up before he could reply.

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Steve Yardley was waiting for her by the taxi. She got in and told the driver to take them to the airport.

"Coral's flying school is over there," Yardley said, pointing to a hangar and a low corrugated building that adjoined it. "That's where I left from."

"Let's go," Laura said.

She opened the door and entered a small office area. There were two girls at typewriters looking bored and a man with his back to the door. He turned as they entered and Laura recognized him.

It was Professor Charles Winstead.

"You're Chuck!" she blurted out.

He gave her a puzzled smile. "I beg your pardon?"

"You're Chuck Coral!"

"Oh, hardly. I'm just here seeing about a charter flight to Miami. I don't even know this Coral fellow."

She turned to Yardley for confirmation and the American shook his head. "That's not him."

"But—"

"He doesn't look anything like him."

"All right," she sighed, accepting it. Professor Winstead nodded pleasantly and went out the door.

Laura turned her attention to one of the office girls. "Is Mr. Coral around?"

The girl shook her head. "He doesn't come in very often. Only when there's a flight going out."

"And when's the next one?"

The girl shrugged. "We never know."

Yardley started to say something, but Laura hustled him out. "It's better if they don't know who you are. Not just yet."

"Why's that?" he asked as they walked back across the grass toward the main airport building.

"I don't know exactly," she admitted. "But if they knew you were back, it could be dangerous for you."

The more she thought about June Wallace's death, the more convinced she was that Coral had been one of the men in the bar the previous evening when she asked her question about Steve Yardley. Those love letters showed that Mona Furniss was a follower, not a leader. She never would have ordered Laura killed on her own—especially since the Chinese obviously worked for Coral. Admittedly Mona might have phoned Coral, who then got in

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touch with the Chinese, but the time element would hardly have allowed it, especially with Mona's husband present. It would have been much easier for her to say a few casual words to someone in the bar than to have got away for a phone call.

But if it wasn't Professor Winstead, who was it? Vincent Tartor, the bearded mystic with all the answers?

Yardley insisted Coral was clean-shaven, but the beard could be false.

She decided it was time to seek out Tartor next.

"Come on," she told Yardley. "I've someone else for you to meet."

Chuck bent down and kissed Mona. "Sorry I'm late. There was some trouble at the shop."

"What sort of trouble?" she asked.

"Laura Charme found the place somehow."

"Damn!"

"Worse than that. Lin Yang recognized her this time from my description. He had another try at killing her and she flattened him with karate. He was just coming to when I found him. I had to kill him. He was a fool anyway, and this way she'll be blamed for it."

"But what about Laura Charme? If she keeps snooping around she's bound to discover something!"

Chuck took a deep breath. "You're going to have to kill her."

"Me! What about you?"

"We're both in this, Mona. I killed Lin Yang. Now it's your turn."

She stubbed out her cigarette and thought about it. "When?"

"Tonight—and the sooner the better. There's another pilot, an Englishman, coming in tomorrow. We want her out of the way before then."

"Will you give me a gun?"

He smiled down at her. "Of course."

Vincent Tartor was staying at the hotel where Laura had seen him the previous evening. She found him in the dining room, eating alone, and he rose as she approached the table. "Ah, one of last night's questioners—and a pretty one at that!"

"I was wondering if you'll be holding another session tomorrow night. I'd like to bring a friend." She gestured toward Yardley.

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"Yes, every Friday and Sunday. Come, by all means."

"Thank you."

He hesitated. "The girl that was with you—she was killed?"

"Yes."

"Strange are the ways of the gods."

"They certainly are," Laura agreed.

When they left the dining room, Yardley looked puzzled. "I don't think it's him, but with that bushy beard I can't be certain."

"You'd better be certain," she warned. On the way in to Hamilton she'd identified herself as an Interpol agent.

"Then I guess it's not him."

She wondered if he was telling the truth. For that matter, trying to remember the blurred photos she'd seen back in Paris, she wondered if he was really Steve Yardley.

When she returned to her guest house, Detective Inspector McKnight was waiting for her. "There are some questions you'll have to answer, Miss Charme," he said.

"About the Chinese who killed June?"

"Yes. His name was Lin Yang, and he's dead."

"Dead?"

"Apparently your karate blow killed him."

"He was alive and breathing when I left."

"You'll have to come along for questioning. I've no choice. He's dead and you admit striking him."

"Listen, I'm with Interpol. You can check with Sebastian Blue in Paris."

"We'll do that. Come along."

The next several hours were frustrating, full of questioning and confusion. While Laura sat on a hard straight-backed chair and waited, McKnight went through the motions of making contact with Interpol on the special frequency, but Sebastian Blue was not available.

"A fine time for him to be off!" she said impatiently.

"It's Saturday night in Paris, and quite late. They don't expect him to report in before Monday morning."

"Well, you can get through to the Secretary General. He'll tell you who I am and what I'm doing here."

McKnight sat down opposite her. "I already have."

"Then you believe me?"

"I still have a dead man to explain."

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"Apparently he was killed by someone else to keep him from talking—by Chuck Coral, I'd say."

"Ah, the elusive Mr. Coral."

"Surely you must know him."

"I've heard the name, but we've never met." He reached into his jacket pocket and took out a small leather pouch. "What do you think of these?" He opened the pouch and spilled a trail of uncut diamonds across the top of the table.

"Diamonds? Are they real?"

"They seem to be."

"Where did you find them?"

"At the curio shop. Well hidden, but I'm a very good searcher."

"Did you find some letters too?"

"From Mona Furniss? Yes, I found them."

"You knew she wrote them?"

He nodded. "I recognized the handwriting. There was a time when she wrote me letters too."

"You?" Suddenly she remembered that McKnight had been in that bar the night before, watching her—or watching Mona?

"She's an odd sort of woman. Her relationship with her husband is most peculiar," he remarked.

"Does George Furniss know about her affair with Coral?"

He shrugged. "Furniss tends pretty much to his security-guard business."

"But you say she wrote letters to you too?"

"Nothing ever came of it. The thing was just a game with her. Mona Furniss's whole life is a game—a game played with the imagination. Mona in Wonderland."

"I wish I knew her better."

"You wouldn't want to." He scooped up the diamonds and returned them to the pouch.

"What are you going to do with those?"

"Evidence."

"Of what?"

He looked at her strangely. "I don't really know."

When McKnight finally released her, close to midnight, Laura felt drained of energy. It had been a long day, with McKnight on both ends of it—though now it seemed ages since he'd awakened her with news of June Wallace's death.

McKnight had brought her to the station in a police car, and he

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hadn't offered her a ride back. She had to take one of the little Bermuda taxis to where she was staying, then walk quickly along the dark path to the guest house.

As she was unlocking the door she heard a sound behind her. It was no more than the breaking of a twig underfoot, but it was exactly the sort of sound she'd been trained to notice. She dropped to the porch floor as a gun roared behind her. Then she was off the porch, weaving through the darkness toward the person who'd fired the shot.

She saw a dim blur of movement in the bushes and ducked low, waiting for another shot. Then she moved a bit to one side and suddenly charged forward. She managed to grab an arm and was rewarded by a soft feminine scream, but she was off balance and couldn't hold the grip. Laura went down, crushing a bush beneath her, and her assailant ran off through the darkness.

It had been Mona Furniss—Laura was certain of that. But there was no point in pursuing her now. There was something hard on the ground beneath her left knee and Laura felt for it. Mona had dropped the gun when Laura seized her arm.

Laura took it inside and examined it in the light. A .38 caliber police special—a professional weapon and an odd one for a woman like Mona to be carrying around. It was new and there was still a greasy film of cosmoline over parts of the metal.

That made two things which had seemed out of place tonight—McKnight's pouch of diamonds and now this new police revolver.

Perhaps she would pay a Sunday-morning visit to the Furniss pool.

George Furniss was sitting by the pool with Professor Winstead when Laura arrived the following morning. Furniss rose and came forward to greet her enthusiastically. "Well! Finally found your way over here, did you? It's a great morning for a swim."

"I didn't bring my suit," Laura said, noting that both of them were fully clothed. "But I couldn't pass by without stopping in to say hello."

"Mona!" Furniss called toward the house. "Look who's here!"

Mona pushed open the sliding glass door and stepped outside. "Oh—Miss Charme, isn't it?"

"That's right," Laura said. Mona Furniss seemed a bit pale at the sight of her, and as she came nearer Laura saw a scratch on

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her arm. The bushes had left their mark.

"Are you going in the pool?"

"Not this morning."

"We were just talking about Miss Wallace's tragic accident," Professor Winstead said. "The funeral is tomorrow morning. Her body is being sent back to Boston today."

"I wonder if McKnight has found out who hit her," Furniss said.

"I hope he finds out something," Laura told them. "This place isn't safe. Someone even took a shot at me last night."

George Furniss looked alarmed. "You mean with a gun?"

"And it didn't miss me by much."

"Didn't anyone hear it and come to help?"

She shook her head. "People in Bermuda must believe in minding their own business."

"I can assign one of my uniformed security guards to your place if you'd like," Furniss offered. "It wouldn't cost you anything."

"No, thanks. I can take care of myself."

"Did you report the shooting to Detective Inspector McKnight?" Mona asked innocently.

"Not yet. I plan to see him today."

"I'd advise it," Furniss said.

"And tonight I'm going back to the hotel for another of Tartor's question-and-answer sessions. I'm convinced June was killed because of something that happened there."

"She was probably killed by a drunken driver," Mona suggested. "It happens all the time."

"But not that often in Bermuda," her husband admitted. "Still, I can't see how Tartor's brand of mysticism can be of much help."

"He answers questions," Laura said. "If I ask the right question, perhaps he'll have the right answer."

There was an awkward silence which Mona finally broke by asking, "Can I get you some coffee? Or a drink?"

"No, thanks. I'm on my way to Hamilton." She paused in her exit to say, "Maybe I'll see you all at Tartor's session tonight."

She wasn't going all the way into Hamilton just yet—only as far as the hotel where she'd hidden Steve Yardley. She'd half expected him to phone her first thing in the morning, and she was a little concerned that she hadn't heard from him. She didn't want anyone else turning up dead like June Wallace and Lin Yang.

Yardley didn't answer her first call to his room, and he still didn't answer her call from the hotel lobby. She checked the coffee

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shop, then went up to his floor. Some fast talking about a lost key persuaded the chambermaid to unlock his door. By that point she was half expecting a body, but there was none. In fact, there was nothing at all to indicate the room had been occupied the previous night. Steve Yardley had vanished again.

Now she began to wonder if he had ever come back at all.

A few hours later Mona Furniss was at Chuck's side as he interviewed the British airline pilot. He was a typical commercial flyer—a man in his early fifties who still showed the vigor of someone much younger.

"You understand what you have to do?" Chuck asked him.

"Sure. No problem."

"We've had a score like you fly the Bermuda Triangle. Sometimes things go wrong. Sometimes men and aircraft don't come back."

"I'll take my chances," he said.

"Good!"

"When do I go up?"

Chuck Coral consulted his schedule book. "Tomorrow morning. Seven o'clock."

"Fine with me. The earlier the better."

"You'll see a flying school out near the airport. I'll be there."

When the pilot had left, Chuck walked to the window and stood for a moment staring out. It was unlike him, and Mona went to his side. "What's the matter, Chuck?"

"I don't know. There's something about him I don't like, something that doesn't ring true. They could send a fake any time, you know—Interpol or even Scotland Yard. This might be him."

"Then let's cancel the flight and lie low for a while."

He smiled down at her. "Do you ever get the feeling they're closing in on us, that it's almost over, that the fun and games are nearly ended?"

"Don't talk like that!"

"It's true, you know. They found the diamonds."

"There are more," she reminded him. "I don't want it to end, Chuck."

"If we could only make a fresh start somewhere—"

"I could have another try at Laura Charme. This time I wouldn't miss."

"She's well named. I think she has a charmed life."

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"Give me another gun, tonight at the hotel."

He shook his head. "No. This time I'll be carrying it." Then he kissed her, very gently.

After spending the afternoon searching for the missing Steve Yardley, Laura arrived at the hotel early. Only Detective Inspector McKnight was in the upstairs room, wearing one of his expensive suits. "You have a nice taste in clothes," she told him.

"My brother owns a men's shop."

She suddenly remembered Friday night at the bar, remembered McKnight watching her with Mona Furniss. She hadn't asked Yardley if McKnight could be Chuck Coral.

"The others are arriving," he said. "We'll talk later."

She saw the Furnisses come in with Professor Winstead and some others. There was an even bigger crowd than Friday night, and she took a seat on the side to await Tartor's appearance. Then, glancing back, she saw something that startled her. Steve Yardley had come in with another man, and they stood together near the door.

Where had he been all day, and why was he here now?

Then a door at the front of the room opened and the bearded Vincent Tartor entered. He bowed slightly and said, "My throat is a bit sore this evening, so we'll dispense with the usual talk and go right to the question period."

Laura's head buzzed.

That voice . . .

It wasn't Vincent Tartor's.

Despite the bushy beard and the dark suit it was someone else.

What was happening? What was going on?

Then suddenly she knew what was expected of her.

"I believe the lady on the side has a question."

She stood on numb legs, as if in a dream, and asked again, "What is the Bermuda Triangle?"

"It is very much akin to the triangle trade of American colonial days," the familiar voice replied, "when molasses came north to New England and rum was shipped out to Africa and slaves were brought back to the Indies. In the Bermuda Triangle, guns are flown out of here to groups in the West Indies. They're traded for narcotics which are then flown into the United States. The triangle is completed by payment in diamonds, to be returned to Bermuda."

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Laura's heart was beating faster. "Who is the man behind this traffic?"

"He calls himself Chuck Coral, but his real name is—"

She heard Mona's scream and then it all happened at once. Sebastian Blue pulled the false beard from his face and shouted, "Stop that man!"

Laura saw him draw the pistol and aim at Sebastian. She lifted her own gun and fired at him over the heads of the seated spectators. He turned as the bullet hit him, spun around by its impact.

Then Mona was on her knees by his side, pressing his bleeding body against her own, screaming and crying as they tried to pull her away. Laura knew the man she'd shot was Chuck Coral, but to the others in the room he was still Mona's husband—George Furniss.

Laura downed her second shot of Scotch and said to Sebastian, "I want to go home. Back to Paris."

"We'll go soon enough," he assured her. "You saved my life out there, you know. McKnight's men didn't move fast enough."

"I didn't even know you were on the island, Sebastian. I was sending messages to you in Paris."

"I flew in last night, after you cabled about the first attempt to kill you. We already had a man coming in as a British pilot, so I came along with him. He made contact with Coral this morning and managed to get the whole story."

"These airline pilots were flying the run for George Furniss? Guns and dope and diamonds? A devil's triangle."

Sebastian Blue nodded. "Don't ask me why a commercial airline pilot earning forty or fifty thousand dollars a year would risk his life on such a mission, but we know a great many did. The adventure, I suppose, the sport of it. Something they couldn't get flying a big 747 from London to New York. Out in Texas there's a place where commercial pilots go to fly old World War Two bombers and fighters on their time off, just for kicks. It's much the same thing, I suppose."

"The sport of it. That was Mona and George too," Laura said. "I've read where some married couples play sex games, imagining picking each other up in bars and such. That was Mona and George. He became Chuck Coral to her—Chuck Coral, the demon lover. They even had their own little pad over the curio shop, and

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she wrote him love letters as if she were cheating on her husband."

"You knew he was Coral?" Sebastian asked.

"When I recognized you behind the false whiskers—in that instant I think I knew everything. Guns and dope and diamonds. McKnight had already found the diamonds, and I remembered the gun Mona dropped last night after she took a shot at me. It was a brand-new police revolver—part of Chuck's next shipment, of course. And that's when I guessed the rest of it. George Furniss was Chuck, buying police weapons in large quantities to supply his force of security guards. He reshipped the guns to his customers in the West Indies and then reordered. A little bribery in the right places would get him past the gun-import regulations, if anyone questioned the duplicate shipments."

"It was a profitable trade," Sebastian confirmed. "I think we'll be finding more diamonds."

"But what about Steve Yardley? What happened to him?"

"What he told you was the truth—up to a point. He was held by the Cubans. But he didn't tell you about the guns and narcotics. When he realized you were Interpol, he decided to get out fast. Happily we recognized him at the airport Saturday night. He's made a full statement. He was luckier than the other pilots."

"And Furniss?"

"He's still alive. Mona is with him at the hospital. With luck they'll both stand trial."

"McKnight told me once about the games she played."

Sebastian nodded. "When I instructed you to make contact with the Furnisses, I had just the tiniest suspicion. Furniss supplied security guards at the airport—it was such a natural way to make contact with pilots looking for a little adventure."

"What about Tartor?"

"I questioned him today about the accident that killed June Wallace. When he told me of your plan to come here tonight, I borrowed his suit and a false beard. I knew you'd recognize me and ask the right questions, and I guessed correctly that it might shock Furniss into revealing himself."

She was still thinking of Mona and George. "I guess they really loved each other, didn't they?"

"I suppose they did," Sebastian agreed. "In their own way."

Laura could not suppress a shiver.

"Come on. I'm ready to go home."

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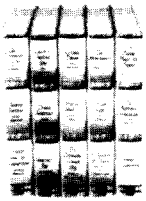

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